



Security Council

Distr.: General
27 July 2020

Original: English

Letter dated 27 July 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 briefings provided by Mr. Geir Pedersen, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, and Ms. Wafa Mustafa, representative of Families for Freedom, as well as the statements delivered by His Excellency Mr. Niels Annen, Minister of State for the German Federal Foreign Office and by the representatives of Belgium, China, the Dominican Republic, Estonia, France, the Niger, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, South Africa, Tunisia, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and Viet Nam in connection with the video-teleconference convened on Thursday, 23 July 2020 on the situation in the Middle East (Syria). Statements were also delivered by the representatives of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Syrian Arab Republic.

In accordance with the procedure set out in the letter dated 2 April 2020 from the President of the Security Council addressed to Permanent Representatives of the members of the Security Council (S/2020/273), which was agreed in the light of the extraordinary circumstances caused by the coronavirus disease pandemic, the briefings and statements will be issued as an official document of the Security Council.

(Signed) Christoph Heusgen
President of the Security Council



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

I thank the Security Council for the opportunity to brief it on Syria and my efforts to facilitate the political process pursuant to resolution 2254 (2015). I am joining the meeting today from Geneva, where I look forward to reconvening the Constitutional Committee next month.

I have placed the issue of detainees, abductees and missing persons at the heart of my efforts since I began my tenure. We regularly meet with the families of detained and missing persons, and their experiences have made a deep impression on me.

This is a humanitarian and human rights issue that demands sustained and meaningful action, in line with international law. Moreover, meaningful action on this file, which touches all Syrian families, could also build significant confidence within society, as well as between the parties and international stakeholders.

My Deputy and I have engaged directly with the parties, and our team also continues to participate in a working group together with Iran, Russia and Turkey, although it has not met now for many months due to coronavirus disease (COVID-19).

Frankly, progress on this file has been vastly insufficient, to the frustration of many Syrians both inside and outside Syria. A great many Syrians remain detained, abducted or missing, and many families still desperately seek information on the fate of their loved ones.

The lack of progress is a pity because this is a cause that we can all get behind. Let me remind the Council that a little over a year ago it unanimously adopted resolution 2474 (2019), on missing persons in armed conflict. It is unfortunate that today in Syria the scale of the problem remains unchanged.

Consequently, I want to begin today with a loud and clear appeal for the Syrian Government and all other Syrian parties to unilaterally release detainees and abductees, and to take meaningful action on missing persons at a scale that is commensurate with the scope of this tragic issue. Without addressing it, true reconciliation, the healing of society's wounds, credible justice and sustainable peace will remain elusive. Let us make the upcoming Eid Al-Adha an occasion that sees more Syrian families welcome their loved ones home.

Of course, the tragedy of detainees, abductees and missing persons represents only a single layer of the humanitarian catastrophe that has engulfed Syria — the greatest of this century.

Syrians are now being hit by yet another tsunami of suffering — economic collapse. Over the past month, Syria's currency has regained some of its lost value, but still remains significantly depreciated relative to last year. In addition we see a downward spiral in almost every other measure. There is rampant inflation, rising unemployment, weakened demand, more businesses shutting down, increased food insecurity, with families skipping meals, and shortages of medicine.

We also now see a rise in reported cases of COVID-19, exacerbating Syria's economic malaise and further constraining the humanitarian response. Testing remains extremely limited, particularly in areas outside Government control. As of 22 July, the Syrian Ministry of Health had confirmed 561 cases — a relatively low figure, but still more than double the cases since my last briefing (see S/2020/551). In addition, the geographical spread of the virus is increasing, penetrating more areas

outside of Damascus, including the first 22 cases in north-western Syria, as well as six cases in the north-east.

Humanitarian access is ever more imperative. Echoing the Secretary-General, I want to call on all parties to the conflict to ensure humanitarian access to all people in need, in accordance with international humanitarian law. I take note of the Council's decision to extend the United Nations cross-border mechanism in north-western Syria via the Bab Al-Hawa border crossing for 12 months.

Let me also echo the Secretary-General's appeal from earlier this year for the waiver of sanctions that can undermine the capacity of the country to ensure access to food, essential health supplies and COVID-19 medical support to respond to the pandemic.

To end Syrians' suffering, we must end the violent conflict through a nationwide ceasefire, in line with resolution 2254 (2015), as well as an effective, targeted, cooperative approach to Council-listed terrorist groups, in line with international humanitarian law.

There has been some progress towards that goal. In recent months, we have seen relative calm throughout Syria, with no major escalation and front lines mostly frozen. But we continue to see flare ups of violence within and across those front lines, which gives us cause for concern.

South-western Syria remains tense. In late June, we saw reports of clashes followed by further protests, assassinations and other security incidents. The Russian Federation has been working to help contain the situation. I have also been sending the same message. Meanwhile, underlying geopolitical tensions persist in the south-west, and I note fresh reports of Israeli air strikes across a broad range of targets in Syria.

In the north-west, the calm brought about by Russian and Turkish efforts continues, largely, to hold. I note further progress in Russian-Turkish cooperation inside the de-escalation area, including the first joint patrols across the entire M4 route. I also note that the extremist Wa-Harid Al-Mu'minin Operations Room, which had launched cross-line attacks against the Syrian Government earlier this year, was forcibly dismantled by listed terrorist group Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham following sustained clashes between the two groups. Last week, we saw an attack on a joint patrol near Ariha, injuring Russian and Turkish soldiers. Subsequently, there was a brief uptick in pro-Government air strikes south of the M4 and shelling in north-west Syria, as well as air strikes on Al-Bab city near the Turkish border. I hope that Russia and Turkey can help contain the situation and sustain calm across north-western Syria.

North-eastern Syria remains broadly stable, but has seen some concerning incidents — most notably, fatal car bombings around Tall Abyad and Ras Al-Ayn, a drone strike resulting in fatalities near the town of Ayn Al-Arab, another drone strike near Al-Darbasiyah and recurring disruptions to the Allouk water station. We appeal to all stakeholders there, local and international, to exercise restraint and uphold the existing arrangements, which have provided calm throughout this year.

Meanwhile, the continuing activity of Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) remains a serious concern in southern, central and eastern Syria, with reported riots among ISIL detainees in Al-Hasakah.

Let me here recall once again that all parties to the conflict remain bound by international humanitarian law, including the rules of distinction, proportionality and precautions in order to avoid civilian harm.

We have now firmed up plans to convene the third session of the Syrian-led and -owned Constitutional Committee. Earlier this week, I was able to confirm with the co-Chair nominated by the Syrian Government and the co-Chair nominated by the Syrian opposition that we will begin in Geneva on 24 August, provided that travel conditions do not change. I was also able to inform middle third members of that as well. I have encouraged all to prepare for a productive session on the agenda and I hope that thereafter we will be able to proceed in subsequent sessions in a regular, business-like and substantive manner.

I hope that the Syrian parties can count on the support of the key international players with influence in ensuring the success of the upcoming session. In that regard, I appreciated the expressions of support from the Presidents of the Astana guarantor countries and the many countries who participated in the fourth Brussels Conference for reconvening and advancing the work of the Constitutional Committee and for the implementation of resolution 2254 (2015).

I also hope that those key international players will work to unlock progress on the broader political process. Only through international dialogue can we begin to address many of the myriad challenges that Syria and Syrians face from humanitarian need, detention, displacement, violence and terror, to economic destitution and the violation of Syria's sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence. We continue to see starkly different views on the nature of these challenges; the debate on sanctions is just one example. There is no sign that this or any of these issues will be resolved by entrenched positioning and rhetoric, in the hope that the other side eventually caves in. Serious and consequential international diplomacy is needed, to bridge significant gaps, including through reciprocal measures.

I believe that this is possible and that common interest exists for such a dialogue. I have been encouraged by the continuing dialogue between the Russian Federation and United States and will continue to engage them and all relevant countries on how to build a constructive Syria diplomacy that can support a Syrian-led and -owned political process facilitated by the United Nations. If that path is not taken, all the other paths would lead to further loss and suffering for everyone, inside and outside Syria. That cannot be in anyone's interest.

That is why, guided by resolution 2254 (2015) and with the support of the key international players and the Council, I hope that we can chart a path forward step by step to end the Syrian people's suffering and allow them to shape their future through the release of those detained and abducted; a nationwide ceasefire to end violent conflict; a safe, calm and neutral environment that enables the safe, voluntary and dignified return of refugees; and a final political settlement built around a new constitution and inclusive free and fair elections under United Nations supervision — one that meets the Syrian people's legitimate aspirations, that fully restores Syria's sovereignty, unity, independence, territorial integrity and economic prosperity.

Annex II

Statement by the representative of Families for Freedom, Wafa Mustafa

I am grateful for this opportunity to address the Council.

My name is Wafa Ali Mustafa. I am a Syrian journalist, activist and member of Families for Freedom, a movement that campaigns for freedom and justice for Syria's detainees.

Two thousand, five hundred and seventy-nine days ago, my father was arrested and forcibly disappeared by the Syrian regime. My father is a human rights defender who protested against injustice and oppression in our country. We have not seen him or heard from him since his disappearance in July 2013. We have never been told why he was taken from us or where he is being held.

After my father's disappearance, we had to flee the country, fearing for our own safety. Today, my mother, two sisters, and I are scattered around the world. In my exile, I met many Syrians who, like me, are counting the days since they last saw their missing loved ones, and I came to understand the massive scale of this horrific crime.

As the Council is aware, more than 130,000 people are believed to be detained and forcibly disappeared. Those numbers continue to rise as the Syrian regime and other groups continue to use detention as a weapon to terrorize civilians in a systematic violation of international law. That was the conclusion of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic. The Council will have heard from my colleagues and seen reports about the horrors inside detention centres. They start with humiliation and violation of human dignity, continue with frequent torture and often end with death for countless detainees.

To have a loved one who is detained or disappeared and not know their fate is like waking up one day and realizing you have lost a limb. It is a growing pain, a pain unlike any other. Even though there is barely anything to hold on to, what keeps me going is living by what my father taught me and the hope that one day he will be free and reunited with us.

I myself was detained in Damascus in September 2011. As I address the Council today, I am reminded of the young women I left behind in prison. I wonder if they ever saw freedom again, if they ever got the chance to pursue their dreams, if they ever dared to become mothers in a country where so many mothers are looking for their missing sons and daughters.

I joined Families for Freedom two years ago. We are a movement of women whose family members have been unlawfully detained or forcibly disappeared by the Syrian state, the Islamic State in Iraq and the Shams, Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham and other armed actors. Since our formation, we have taken to the streets and knocked on every door we can, demanding serious action for Syria's disappeared, for Syria's future.

As families of detainees we are deeply frustrated by the collective inaction and abdication of responsibility by the Security Council to address this crime against humanity. My colleagues have shared our stories and demands with the Council, but to date no progress has been made. We hear excuses about the need to prioritize other humanitarian or political issues in Syria, that now is not the time to focus on detainees. But all these issues are connected and the Council can and must address them all at once.

I speak to the Council today with the added urgency of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. I ask for unified support behind the large-scale unilateral release of all people held in prisons and unofficial detention centres, where detainees are held in cramped conditions and exposed to torture and deprivation of proper food, water, sanitation and medical care. These centres are breeding grounds for illnesses and viruses.

How will our loved ones survive a COVID-19 outbreak under these conditions? At the very least, international medical and humanitarian organizations must be allowed regular unconditional access to detention facilities, especially considering the recent escalation of COVID-19 infections in Syria and the lack of transparency from the Syrian regime about the real scale of the outbreak.

The Council must put pressure on Syrian authorities and other actors to immediately release the names of people held in all places of detention, as well as their locations and situations. Torture and mistreatment must immediately cease, and detainees must be allowed routine contact with their families. In the cases of where detainees have died, families must be informed of the causes and given access to burial sites.

I reiterate that we, as families of detainees, do not accept prisoner exchanges arranged between military sides as a substitute for a comprehensive solution to the crime of unlawful detention and enforced disappearance in Syria. Our loved ones have been unjustly snatched from us and must be given their freedom; it is their right and ours.

We welcome the trials in Germany of individuals charged with State-sponsored torture under the principle of universal jurisdiction. We encourage other countries to follow Germany's lead in pursuing justice. However, our real hope is to see perpetrators come before the International Criminal Court.

Our plight is urgent. Young women and men are being arrested at this very moment, and loved ones are at risk of contracting COVID-19 today. Right now, broken-hearted families are searching for their loved ones in photos of tortured bodies.

I frequently receive messages from families of detainees, sometimes dozens a day. They have not given up on demanding answers about their loved ones. I wonder how many members of the Security Council can also say they have not given up on their responsibility to protect civilians, defend human rights and see justice done.

Annex III**Statement by the Minister of State at the Federal Foreign Office of Germany, Niels Annen**

I would like to thank Ms. Mustafa for her testimony today and for her call for justice. Few people have shown her courage in pressing for accountability.

According to the numbers provided by the Syrian Network for Human Rights, almost 150,000 people have disappeared, and Syrian regime forces account for almost 90 per cent of them. Where are they? More than 14,400 Syrians have died as a result of torture, almost 99 per cent of them at the hands of Syrian regime forces. The stark “Caesar photos” show their agony. We must not forget these faces. We owe it to them to make progress on justice and accountability. Wafa Mustafa and all families of detainees and missing persons have a right to know what happened to their loved ones in Syrian prisons.

Resolution 2254 (2015) calls for the immediate release of arbitrarily detained persons, particularly women and children. But since its adoption in December 2015 (see S/PV.7588), arbitrary detention, forced disappearances, torture and sexual violence in Syrian prisons and detention facilities continue unabated.

Today, the Security Council should be united in urging all parties to immediately release all arbitrarily detained persons, starting with the most vulnerable, namely, women and children, the sick, the wounded and the elderly. This call should be loud and clear and directed particularly at the Syrian regime, which holds the overwhelming majority of detainees. I also call on the Syrian regime to allow immediate, unconditional and unhindered access for relevant humanitarian organizations to all its prisons and detention facilities. Finally, the Syrian regime must inform the families of the fate and whereabouts of the disappeared.

I would also like to thank Special Envoy Pedersen for his briefing. We fully support his analysis that peace and reconciliation in Syria can only be achieved through a political process under the auspices of the United Nations in line with resolution 2254 (2015). I therefore welcome Mr. Pedersen’s intention to finally resume the work of the Constitutional Committee. I urge all parties to take up the invitation and engage constructively. Further, I echo Mr. Pedersen’s call for a complete, immediate, nationwide ceasefire.

In its latest report, the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic has detailed human rights violations and war crimes in Idlib. This reporting as well as the findings of the Investigation and Identification Team of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons and of the United Nations Headquarters Board of Inquiry demonstrate that the Syrian regime and its allies are responsible for indiscriminate attacks against civilians and civilian infrastructure in north-west Syria.

Germany continues to support all efforts, in particular those of the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to Assist in the Investigation and Prosecution of Those Responsible for the Most Serious Crimes under International Law Committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011 and of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry, to ensure that the most serious crimes and atrocities committed during the Syrian conflict do not go unpunished, that perpetrators will be held accountable and that victims receive justice.

There has to be a follow-up to the findings of all these reports. We must not tolerate impunity. Russia and China blocked the referral of the situation in Syria to the International Criminal Court (ICC). It is their responsibility that those who

committed and are still committing the most serious crimes in Syria cannot be brought to justice before the ICC.

However, national jurisdictions are starting to fill the void. Two former officials of the Syrian regime's repression apparatus have been charged with crimes against humanity at a court in Koblenz, Germany. For the first time, abductions, torture and abuse by the Syrian regime are being prosecuted in Germany. At the same time, members of Da'esh are being brought before German courts; several have already been sentenced. Furthermore, German authorities recently arrested two men for their support of Jabhat Al-Nusra and for the commission of war crimes in Syria. Our message is clear: whoever commits crimes against humanity or war crimes cannot feel safe anywhere and will eventually be held accountable.

I call on all other States to use all legal means at their disposal to go after the perpetrators, and I call on the Security Council to finally live up to its responsibility, join the fight against impunity and ensure that those responsible for torture and killing in Syrian prisons and for other atrocities are held to account. The victims deserve justice.

Annex IV

Statement by the Permanent Representative of Belgium to the United Nations, Marc Pecsteen de Buytswerve

I would like to start by thanking Mr. Pedersen for his briefing and Ms. Mustafa for her moving briefing.

At the end of March, Mr. Pedersen made a call that comprised three main elements: the need for an immediate nationwide ceasefire, the need for the large-scale release of detainees, and the need for full humanitarian access (see S/2020/254). These elements are indeed essential — also in the fight against coronavirus disease — and we continue our support with a view to fully implementing efforts on those elements. Let us be clear: during the last month, infections have doubled in Syria. Although the numbers are low, the fact that the pandemic has been spreading throughout the country is worrying, especially as testing capacity remains limited. The prevention of this spread must be an absolute priority for Syria, as the virus may not only entail a health crisis, but it could also lead to a further worsening of the dire socioeconomic conditions that Syrians across the country are facing.

We are relieved about the relative calm in the north-west of the country since the Russian-Turkish ceasefire arrangement was implemented at the beginning of March. However, recent attacks illustrate the fragility of the situation. We repeat that any counter-terrorism activity should respect human rights and international humanitarian law. The risks for hundreds of thousands of vulnerable civilians in this region are enormous. We therefore urge all parties to refrain from violence, reduce tension and exercise maximum restraint. The United Nations should play a central role in the implementation of a nationwide ceasefire, as well as in its monitoring.

The recent protests in the south and elsewhere in the country are a symptom of a far greater crisis. Little progress has been made on the political level. However, after nine years of violence and brutal suppression, the long road to peace can only pass through an inclusive political process. We therefore encourage all parties, in particular the Syrian authorities, to fully engage in the upcoming planned meeting of the Constitutional Committee. The political track must urgently be reinvigorated, in line with an immediate and full implementation of resolution 2254 (2015).

Tangible progress must also urgently be made with regard to political prisoners and missing persons. It is high time to move beyond one-for-one prisoner exchanges. It is high time for the Syrian authorities to release those arbitrarily detained and to share information on all missing persons. Access to detainees must be ensured in line with international regulations. As Ms. Mustafa has said, families of the disappeared continue to suffer from the lack of information about their missing loved ones. They grieve emotionally, but they also have to face the consequences of continuous administrative and judicial restrictions that affect their lives on a daily basis. We therefore encourage the sustained engagement of the Special Envoy in this regard.

We also salute Ms. Mustafa's courage and actions with respect to accountability. In order to break the cycle of violence, justice must take place. Belgium fully supports all accountability initiatives, including the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to Assist in the Investigation and Prosecution of Those Responsible for the Most Serious Crimes under International Law Committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011 and its support for criminal proceedings in national and international courts

Finally, the current state of the Syrian economy is a consequence of nine years of war, corruption, mismanagement and oppression. European Union sanctions are targeted at those who ordered or carried out attacks and acts of torture against

their own people, made or used chemical weapons, or built their personal fortune on the war economy. These sanctions are carefully crafted to avoid any adverse humanitarian effects or unintended consequences for persons who are not targeted. The European Union and its member States have continuously supported the Syrian people and are collectively the largest humanitarian donor to Syria, as was clearly evidenced at the last Brussels Conference at the end of June. Indeed, we have contributed over €17 billion since the beginning of the Syrian war.

Annex V**Statement by the Deputy Permanent Representative of China to the United Nations, Geng Shuang**

I thank Special Envoy Pedersen for his briefing. We appreciate his unstinting efforts under very challenging circumstances. I also thank Ms. Mustafa for her briefing.

China's position on the Syrian issue has been consistent. We have supported a Syrian-led and Syrian-owned political process from the very beginning. We encourage and support the Special Envoy in making every effort to promote political dialogue and enhance mutual trust among the parties concerned. We hope the ceasefire appeals by Secretary-General and the Special Envoy will be accepted by all parties to the conflict so as to foster an enabling environment for negotiations.

We are pleased to learn that the Constitutional Committee will hold its third round of consultations by the end of August, and we look forward to seeing more progress therein. It could become a window of opportunity if the Syrian parties engage constructively with each other and with the United Nations Special Envoy under the Constitutional Committee framework.

China welcomes the convening of the Astana virtual summit on 1 July and the joint statement released thereafter by Iran, Russia and Turkey. The joint statement contains many positive elements related to the situation in Syria, including standing against separatist agendas, opposing the illegal seizure and transfer of oil revenues that belong to Syria, and rejecting all unilateral sanctions. China would be happy to see the Astana process continuing to contribute to the political process in Syria.

With regard to the economic situation in Syria, we are deeply concerned by the bleak picture painted by the Special Envoy. The devaluation of Syrian currency and soaring food prices are exacerbating the grave humanitarian situation in Syria and further hurting the Syrian people across the country. The World Food Programme and the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization have repeatedly sounded the alarm on food insecurity in Syria.

The reasons behind the suffering of the Syrian people are self-evident. Years of economic blockade and illegal sanctions have worsened the socioeconomic and humanitarian situations in Syria, undermined the livelihoods of the Syrian people, and caused tremendous hardships for innocent civilians, in particular women and children. At this critical time, the unilateral sanctions have further compromised the capacity of Syria to ensure access to food, essential health supplies and medical support in response to the coronavirus disease pandemic. These sanctions are inhumane and totally unacceptable.

The international community must take actions to help the Syrian Government cope with these economic and humanitarian challenges. We urge relevant countries to respond actively to the appeals of the Secretary-General and his Special Envoy on immediately lifting unilateral sanctions. We also request the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs to assess the humanitarian impact of unilateral sanctions as an integral part of its humanitarian reports. Those who claim that unilateral sanctions have not harmed Syria should join China and many other countries in requesting a report of the Secretary-General on the issue.

We welcome the efforts of relevant parties aimed at maintaining the ceasefire and promoting stability in Syria. The international community must be alerted to and keep an eye on terrorist activities in the north-west of the country. We should not allow terrorist groups to take advantage of the current situation. The Security Council should support the Special Envoy's call for effective, cooperative and

targeted counter-terrorism efforts. We call on relevant parties to launch negotiations and take concrete counter-terrorism actions .

The future of Syria must be decided by the Syrians without foreign interference. It is fundamental 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 fulfilling his mandate set out in resolution 2254 (2015) and work with the international community for a lasting peace in Syria.

Annex VI

Statement by the Permanent Mission of the Dominican Republic to the United Nations

I thank Special Envoy Pedersen for his briefing. I would also like to extend our gratitude to Ms. Mustafa, not only for her presence in this video-teleconference today, but for her decision to lend her voice to drawing attention to the many women and girls who still live in detention in Syria. Many might have taken the legitimate decision to move on, but her determination to advocate on behalf of the families of detainees is a source of inspiration.

Those in detention as well as those in over-cramped camps are at a higher risk of suffering from the devastating potential effects of a global pandemic. But they are also suffering from another pandemic — that of living a life without knowing when their nightmare will end or when they will be reunited with their families.

The unilateral humanitarian release of detainees in the context of the coronavirus disease pandemic must, and will, bring some sense of humanity to the many families that still do not know the whereabouts of their loved ones. Accordingly, we continue to encourage the Special Envoy and the Member States with the ability to do so to strengthen their efforts until more significant results are seen in this particular area.

The Dominican Republic invites the Syrian Arab Republic, in coordination with relevant international organizations, civil society, women's organizations and young people, to join their fellow Syrians and realize that goal. Families should be reunited, there needs to be justice and accountability, and impunity needs to cease to exist if we genuinely want sustainable peace in Syria. Families are the very fabric of society from which nations are made. With political will, joint efforts and determination, this could be the starting point towards the country that Syrians legitimately want for themselves.

We are satisfied with the news that the Constitutional Committee will be able to meet at the end of August for the first time in almost ten months. We are also fully aware of the difficult and complex process that ultimately led to this meeting; therefore, while managing our expectations, we would like to wish all participating parties a successful session and to encourage them to move things forward with the due diligence that the issue deserves.

The Syrian people will wait no longer. They must not continue to harbour the sense of defeat, mistrust or hopelessness that has been in them for so long as a result of a long and painful conflict. Hope must return. In that regard, the peaceful protests that have taken place in recent weeks over a range of grievances must be allowed and heeded. Violence and tensions must be avoided, and dialogue and durable solutions need to be put in place.

In conclusion, we reiterate our full support for a Syrian-led, Syrian-owned political process that, through United Nations facilitation and in line with the provisions of resolution 2254 (2015), can achieve the legitimate aspirations of a population heavily beaten down by conflict.

We urge all parties to the conflict, as well as all relevant actors, to adhere to the ceasefire agreements in order to protect civilians and to refrain from any violation of international humanitarian law.

The world is watching. Justice and accountability will be ensured.

Annex VII**Statement by the Deputy Permanent Representative of Estonia to the United Nations, Gert Auväärt**

I thank Special Envoy Pedersen and Ms. Wafa Mustafa for their briefings.

It is positive to hear that the ceasefire in Idlib largely holds. But, like other Council members, we are concerned about the continued sporadic violence in the north-west of Syria. Only last week, we witnessed an attack on a Russian-Turkish joint patrol, as well as a car bomb explosion in Bab Al-Salam, which killed at least five people. The perpetrators of such crimes must be held accountable.

Looking at the political situation, we see new setbacks. Unfortunately, the conflict of nine years is far from over. Rebuilding and unifying the country remains a challenge, as Damascus makes unilateral moves that undermine a political settlement. Over the weekend, the Syrian Government organized elections in government-controlled areas. However, Syrian citizens in opposition-held areas and abroad were unable to participate in the so-called elections. In other words, millions of Syrian citizens were denied their right to freely express their political will in fair elections.

That act clearly violates the political road map set out in resolution 2254 (2015). As such, the international community will not recognize those or any other elections until a credible political transition is under way in Syria. Unfortunately, to this day, Damascus is not genuinely interested in the political process, even if there is agreement on the holding of Constitutional Committee meetings. Instead, the Syrian Government continues to use force against its own population. The torture of arbitrarily detained people is a perfect example of that brutal approach.

Ms. Mustafa gave us detailed descriptions of the situation of detainees in overcrowded Syrian prisons, which further convinced us of the seriousness of the problem. Estonia demands the immediate, unilateral release of arbitrarily detained Syrians, especially women and minors.

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

[Original: English and French]

I thank Special Envoy Geir Pedersen and Ms. Wafa Mustafa for their briefings.

There is an urgent need to relaunch a credible political process in order to bring Syria and the region back on the road to stability.

France will not recognize the results of the sham elections held on 19 July in the areas controlled by the regime. In order to be legitimate, any election must meet the criteria set out in resolution 2254 (2015): it must be free and transparent, take place under United Nations supervision and allow all Syrians, including the diaspora, to participate. The recent parliamentary elections did not meet any of those criteria and deprived millions of displaced Syrians and refugees of their right to vote.

The only legitimate political process is the one taking place in Geneva under the aegis of the United Nations. We call for the resumption of discussions as soon as possible, in preparation for the third meeting of the Constitutional Committee. The regime's continued blocking of the work of the Constitutional Committee is unacceptable. It will be the responsibility of the Security Council to take note if the Committee's work is blocked again.

The Constitutional Committee alone will not be sufficient to establish a credible political transition. All the elements of resolution 2254 (2015) must be implemented in order to meet the expectations of the Syrian people. Ms. Mustafa reminded us of the importance of making progress on the issue of detainees and missing persons. The Council must unite in response to her call and that of the Special Envoy for the release of prisoners and greater access to detention centres.

The establishment of a ceasefire under the aegis of the United Nations remains more necessary than ever. Growing instability, particularly in the areas reconquered by the regime and in the north-west, as well as the resurgence of Da'esh in the centre of the country, are worrying. The coronavirus disease pandemic is spreading, including in the north-west, while humanitarian access to that region has been reduced in the absence of agreement in the Council.

The truce in the north-west must be preserved, and an immediate cessation of hostilities and a humanitarian pause must be implemented in accordance with resolution 2532 (2020), which endorsed the Secretary-General's appeal. That is the condition for uniting our efforts in the fight against the terrorist groups listed by the Council, in full compliance with international humanitarian law.

In the current context, the priority remains responding to the immense humanitarian needs of the population throughout Syria. That is what France and the European Union have once again committed to at the fourth Brussels conference. France regrets the non-renewal of the cross-border mechanism for the Bab Al-Salam crossing point, which provided vital access for 1.3 million people in the Aleppo region. We will continue to assist Syrians and ensure that this aid is not diverted or manipulated by the regime.

The economic crisis in Syria is the result of disastrous economic management, chronic corruption and the regime's destruction of its own country. European sanctions target individuals and entities that participate in the repression and profit from the fallout from the conflict. They are accompanied by mechanisms to safeguard humanitarian and medical aid.

Neither France nor the European Union will finance reconstruction until a credible political process is initiated. France will continue to fully support mechanisms to fight impunity and welcomes in that regard the latest report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry regarding Idlib.

Annex IX**Statement by the Deputy Permanent Representative of the Niger to the United Nations, Niandou Aougi**

I thank Special Envoy Pedersen for his briefing and Ms. Wafa Mustafa for her presentation. I extend a warm welcome to the Permanent Representative of the Syrian Arab Republic, Bashar Ja'afari, and the Permanent Representative of Iran, Majid Takht Ravanchi.

Let me start by strongly condemning the recent terrorist attack in Azaz, which killed eight people and injured more than 80 others, including women and children. This attack is a clear sign that the terrorist groups have been taking advantage of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic to regroup and strike again. My delegation reiterates that the efforts of the international community and the Syrian Government to fight terrorism should continue, in compliance with international humanitarian and human rights law, in tandem with the equally important fight against the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Niger reiterates its support for a nationwide ceasefire in Syria, as called for by the Secretary-General and his Special Envoy Geir Pedersen, to enable an all-out effort against the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Russia-Turkey ceasefire agreement of 6 March is still holding and has helped reduce hostilities in north-west Syria, despite some breaches observed in the deconfliction zone. We call upon the Syrian parties, with the facilitation of Special Envoy Pedersen, to build on that synergy in order to progress towards a comprehensive ceasefire.

My delegation remains persuaded that there can be no military solution to the Syrian crisis. The only viable way to resolve the crisis is a permanent political solution, inspired and owned by the Syrians themselves, with the support of the United Nations, and in line with resolution 2254 (2015). In that regard, we are hoping to see real progress at the next Constitutional Committee meeting in August. We call on all parties involved to show openness and willingness to negotiate in good faith for the sake of lasting peace in Syria. The United Nations must lend all necessary support to that process, in keeping with resolution 2254 (2015).

The Niger takes note of the recent legislative elections in Syria. However, we insist on the necessity of any political process being inclusive of all Syrians in order to guarantee the integrity and legitimacy of the institutions that would result from such an exercise.

As cases of COVID-19 are on the rise in Syria, my delegation echoes the Special Envoy's call to all parties to consider releasing detainees and take significant steps to clarify the whereabouts of missing persons. Such steps can foster confidence between the parties as they prepare for the next round of political talks.

We also call for a humanitarian waiver or suspension of unilateral economic sanctions that can undermine Syria's capacity to respond to the pandemic. The current unilateral sanctions are affecting Syria's economy, and the spread of COVID-19 will worsen the situation not only for Syria, but also for its neighbours, as it is the case with Lebanon, which is hosting millions of Syrian refugees amid a severe economic crisis. The consequences of the collapse of the Syrian economy are affecting Syrians, irrespective of whether they are in government-controlled or other areas.

To conclude, it is high time for the Security Council members to stop politicizing this crisis and find even the smallest common denominator in order to support and advance the political process in Syria. The accusations by some and the denials by others will not only fail to advance the search for a political solution but will also prolong the suffering of Syrians.

Annex X**Statement by the Counsellor of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines to the United Nations, Diani Jamesha Arianne Prince**

I would like to thank Special Envoy Pedersen and Ms. Mustafa for their briefings.

There is no military answer to the decade-long Syrian conflict. The only path to ending the suffering of the Syrian people is through an unyielding commitment to an inclusive political process in accordance with resolution 2254 (2015). Saint Vincent and the Grenadines therefore continues to support the Special Envoy's determined efforts in that regard. We welcome the proposed plan to convene a new session of the Constitutional Committee towards the end of August. It is our hope that this meeting will indeed materialize and will be characterized by constructive engagement.

The security situation in Syria is intimately linked to the advancement and success of the political process. Without sustained calm, the process will be severely hindered and the already dire humanitarian situation will worsen. Although the country's security situation is currently in a fragile state, the March ceasefire agreement is an encouraging step and has laid the groundwork for what will hopefully develop into a full, nationwide cessation of hostilities.

We take note of the 1 July tripartite summit in the Astana format. We applaud the Astana Guarantors' earnest efforts and encourage the involvement of the United Nations. We support continued dialogue and meaningful diplomatic action by States to preserve the ceasefire in the north-west and to further advance the wider political process.

Syria should not be used as an arena for geopolitical confrontation, and it is imperative that its sovereignty and territorial integrity be respected and preserved. This dictates the withdrawal of all unauthorized foreign forces and the continued fight against Security Council-designated terrorist groups seeking to take advantage of the ceasefire and the coronavirus disease pandemic. On the point of counter-terrorism efforts, we reiterate that all activities ought to be collaborative, targeted and in line with international humanitarian law and international human rights law.

Confidence-building measures are critical to the conflict resolution process. In that respect, we emphasize the importance of addressing the issue of detainees, particularly in consideration of the pandemic. Further, the question of the fate of missing persons remains. These matters must be given the urgent attention they require in order to foster trust and to ensure transparency and accountability.

We remain deeply concerned by the rapidly deteriorating economic situation in Syria, which has been made worse by both the inescapable repercussions of the pandemic and the continued application of unilateral coercive measures. These measures serve to intensify and prolong the anguish of the Syrian people, who already suffer the devastating effects of currency inflation and lack of access to basic commodities. For this reason, we yet again appeal for the lifting of all unilateral coercive measures to assist Syria in facing the current challenges.

The situation in Syria demands our continued attention and a pragmatic approach to ensure that peace and stability are restored. Above all, we must always keep the Syrian people at the forefront of all deliberations and remember that it is them who must chart their own destiny.

Annex XI**Statement by the Permanent Mission of South Africa to the United Nations**

We welcome your participation, Mr. Minister, in today's meeting. Allow me to begin by thanking Special Envoy Geir Pedersen and Ms. Wafa Mustafa for their briefings today.

South Africa welcomes the relative calm that has held across Syria, particularly in the north-west, amid isolated and sporadic incidents of hostilities in parts of the north-west and north-east of the country. However, South Africa is concerned about the resurgence of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Sham (ISIS), especially its operations into densely populated areas and its efforts to expand its geographical reach. It appears that the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic has widened the scope of the ISIS operations.

Peace will not be achieved if there is continued foreign interference in Syria. We therefore call for the withdrawal of all foreign troops and armed groups in respect for the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of Syria. Syria cannot continue to be a proxy battlefield for the ambitions of terrorist groups and international rivalries.

In that regard, we would also state that all States have the sovereign right to address the threat of terrorism in their own countries. However, such actions to counter terrorism must be in compliance with the responsibilities and obligations under international human rights law and international humanitarian law.

As members of the Security Council, we all have the same goal with regard to Syria, namely, a permanent ceasefire that will pave the way for 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.

In that regard, we look forward to the reconvening of the small body of the Constitutional Committee in Geneva in late August. We call on all parties and participants to constructively engage in these discussions to find concrete steps towards the drafting of a new constitution as we work towards peace and stability for all Syrians. In working towards a credible peace process, South Africa encourages all parties to engage in trust and confidence-building measures.

South Africa remains deeply troubled by the continued detention of individuals, including women and children, by parties in areas under their effective control. It is unacceptable that people are detained seemingly without cause. In that regard, South Africa wishes to call on all parties to the conflict to abide by their obligation to respect international human rights law and international humanitarian law concerning persons deprived of their liberty. We continue to call on the parties to release detained civilians, particularly women, children, the elderly and vulnerable groups, which during these times of COVID-19 include the sick and those with underlying medical conditions.

In keeping with confidence-building measures and to promote progress in that regard, South Africa urges the international community to support the Secretary-General's call to ease the unilateral coercive economic measures placed on the Syrian Government. It is clear that the sanctions imposed have increased economic pressures in the country, exacerbated the current dire humanitarian situation and added further strain due to the impact of COVID-19.

In the light of the COVID-19 pandemic, South Africa reiterates the need for the parties to adhere to the full implementation of the Idlib ceasefire agreement

as well as the immediate cessation of hostilities across Syria. South Africa also reiterates its call for the safe, unimpeded and impartial delivery of humanitarian aid and assistance to all who require it, in line with the provisions of international humanitarian law.

In conclusion, South Africa would like to reiterate that there can be no military solution to the situation in Syria. Only trust, dialogue and negotiation among the parties, through an inclusive Syrian-led and Syrian-owned political process in line with resolution 2254 (2015), can bring about sustainable peace and stability.

Annex XII

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

I thank the United Nations Special Envoy for Syria, Mr. Pedersen, and Ms. Mustafa for their briefings. I would also like to take this opportunity to express Tunisia's support for Mr. Pedersen's good offices in pushing the implementation of resolution 2254 (2015).

After nearly a decade of conflict and destruction, the prospects for Syria, the Syrian people and the region at large have never looked bleaker. Special Envoy Pedersen eloquently captured in his briefing those worrisome trends, and I would like to underline some of them in my national capacity.

On the economic and humanitarian fronts, the picture is grim and, we believe, needs the urgent focus of the Security Council. Syria is facing economic freefall and further pauperization of the population, which are exacerbated by the impact of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) and economic difficulties. The United Nations has warned of the risks of famine in the light of food insecurity reaching unprecedented levels, as well as massive poverty and unemployment rates.

The surge in recent days of COVID-19 cases and mortality numbers across Syria is another concerning development that is likely to worsen the humanitarian crisis, particularly in vulnerable areas. We stress that the tackling of the coronavirus spread needs to be urgently stepped up, including through the sufficient and unimpeded provision of tests, treatments and medicine, as well as support for Syria's downgraded medical infrastructure, in order to avert a worst-case scenario.

On the political and security front, we are concerned about the early signs of a relapse into conflict in northern Syria following several weeks of general calm, along with rampant insecurity and unrest in southern Syria. We have been witnessing in recent days continued terrorist provocations along the contact lines in Idlib, military reinforcements on the ground and the resumption of limited military operations in rural Idlib and rural Aleppo. We reiterate our call on all parties to keep their abiding commitments, de-escalate tensions and exercise utmost self-restraint to enable sustained calm and a truce.

We are also following closely the ongoing process of either absorbing or dismantling competitors, enemies and spoilers among terrorist and extremist factions in Idlib. We stress the importance of a collective approach towards eradicating the safe haven that Security Council-listed terrorist organizations, such as Hayat Tahrir al-Sham and Da'esh, have established in Idlib and beyond in order for any peace to take hold in Syria and the region over the long term. In that regard, we welcome the ongoing efforts to tackle Da'esh on all its fronts, including its financing and economic structure in Syria and the region.

Tunisia is particularly concerned about the unabated recruitment of fighters from Syria who are transferred to fuel conflict and unrest in neighbouring Libya. This is a stark reminder that the Syrian vacuum left by conflict and economic collapse is enabling wider forces of instability, stretching from the Middle East to North Africa.

Put together, Syria is unfortunately today ground zero for a regional collapse that requires the due attention and collective action of the international community and the Council to reverse the negative security, humanitarian and socioeconomic trends.

We look forward to the resumption of the Constitutional Committee talks in Geneva next month. This is perhaps the only glimmer of hope amid the worsening crisis. The critical situation within which Syria is engulfed today commands all the more the Syrian parties to work constructively together and seek compromises and common ground in order to make swift progress on the political process under the able facilitation of Special Envoy Pedersen.

We reiterate that there is no viable alternative to a political solution, in line with resolution 2254 (2015) — a solution that is by and for the Syrians, puts an end to terrorism and foreign intervention and preserves Syria's unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Annex XIII**Statement by the Political Coordinator of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the United Nations, Sonia Farrey**

I thank Special Envoy Pedersen for his briefing. I also thank Ms. Wafa Mustafa for her briefing on the vital work done by Families for Freedom.

We remain deeply concerned by the situation in north-western Syria. Although Russian and Turkish patrols have now succeeded under constant threat over the full distance of the M4 highway, reports of recent Russian air strikes on Al-Bab, as well as increased shelling and terrorist attacks, are a real potential for a slide back to the levels of conflict that we saw at the start of this year.

We know what the humanitarian impact of the breakdown of the ceasefire in the north-west would be. Indeed, we have yet more evidence through the recent report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/44/61), released on 7 July, and, as the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights puts it, unfathomable suffering endured by Syrian children, women and men during the military campaign launched on Idlib in 2019 and the start of this year.

This includes indiscriminate attacks on civilians, hospitals and schools by pro-regime forces, backed by Russia, the killing and injuring of thousands, arrests, torture, probable war crimes by extremist forces and dire displacement conditions at the border. This is made clear in the Commission of Inquiry's report, which finds that 47 attacks that were investigated in Idlib were conducted by the regime's ground and air forces and were assisted by Russian air forces. The Commission also finds reasonable grounds to believe that war crimes had been committed by the regime and Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham. It is the task of the United Nations and its Member States, in particular all members of the Council, to ensure that this does not recur.

If the ceasefire breaks down, two additional factors are likely to exacerbate the suffering. First, cases of the coronavirus disease have now been confirmed in the north-west, and the numbers are beginning to increase. Tackling a widespread outbreak in the north-west would in any case be a challenge, but further conflict would likely render this task impossible. Secondly, Russian and Chinese politicization of humanitarian access means that it is much more difficult for the 1.3 million people who had previously received aid through the Bab Al-Salam crossing to receive that aid.

The consequences of a further outbreak and violence would be catastrophic. The United Kingdom therefore once again calls for an immediate cessation of hostilities in support of the requests of the United Nations Special Envoy and the Secretary-General. This call is now as urgent as ever. We call on all parties to work with the Special Envoy towards a nationwide ceasefire.

We welcome the attendance and briefing of Wafa Mustafa today and commend her vital work and that of Families for Freedom, her bravery and her fighting for young girls, women and families who have been impacted by the detentions. We call on the Syrian regime to engage with the United Nations Special Envoy to discuss this critically important issue. There needs to be widespread releases of political prisoners and vulnerable people in line with what we all agreed in resolution 2254 (2015). Medical care must be available to those in detention.

We were moved by Ms. Mustafa's own story about her father. Indeed, there remain an estimated 120,000 persons missing as a result of this conflict. These

include persons missing as a consequence of summary executions, arbitrary and incommunicado detention, kidnapping, abduction, enslavement, sarin gas attacks and other human rights abuses, as well as combatants and civilians missing as a direct result of fighting in the day-to-day ravages of war. We recognize the psychological trauma of those left behind.

The United Kingdom is proud to provide financial support — \$1.6 million from 2019 to next year — for the efforts of the International Commission on Missing Persons (ICMP) towards the immense task of accounting for missing persons in Syria. We wholly support the ICMP's role as the holder of an impartial missing persons database, and we stress the need for a process for missing persons that accounts for all missing persons regardless of their role in the conflict or their origin, in accordance with international human rights and the rule of law. This work is vital for the rights of families of the missing to justice, truth and reparations.

Any credible peace process has to address the issue of missing persons and detainees. In order for this to happen, the Syrian regime must properly and genuinely engage with the Special Envoy and the other parties on the peace process.

We take note of the parliamentary elections held in Syria on Sunday. Resolution 2254 (2015), which we adopted unanimously, remains unequivocal regarding expectations for elections in Syria. They needed to be free and fair, administered under the supervision of the United Nations, and meet the high standards of transparency and accountability, with all Syrians, including members of the diaspora, being eligible to participate.

Sunday's parliamentary elections clearly did not meet these requirements. There were no independent observers and nearly half of Syria's population, including 6 million refugees, could not even vote. The way in which these elections were conducted sends a clear message that the Syrian regime has not really been interested in inclusion, fairness or a political process that is owned and led by all Syrians or that allows all Syrians a role in deciding their own future.

Finally, I would just like to address the comment made by the Russian representative about the White Helmets. The United Kingdom is proud of its support for the White Helmets and its life-saving search and rescue operations and activities in Syria alongside other donors. The organization is estimated to have saved over 115,000 lives and provided essential services to more than 4 million Syrians.

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

I would like to welcome His Excellency Mr. Niels Annen, Minister of State at the German Federal Foreign Office, to today's meeting. I would also like to thank Mr. Pedersen for his insightful briefing and Ms. Mustafa for sharing her story and information.

The current precarious situation in Syria in all socioeconomic and security domains presents a renewed demand for a comprehensive and long-lasting political solution. It also shows that such a solution can be achieved only through Syrian-led and Syrian-owned dialogues, in line with resolution 2254 (2015) and in full accordance with international law. No solution can be legitimate or lasting if it does not respect the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of States.

Viet Nam welcomes the readiness of the relevant parties for engagement within the framework of the Constitutional Committee and calls on them to seize this opportunity to put an end to the protracted conflict. We look forward to the successful conduct of its next session in Geneva as soon as the situation allows. We will continue to support the good offices of the Special Envoy in that regard.

Our delegation is gravely concerned over the recent flare-up in the north-west as well as other violent incidents in other parts of Syria in the past few days. Of particular concern is the attack on 19 July in the north, which resulted in casualties — dozens of civilians, including women and children. We strongly condemn all attacks against civilians and would like to express our deepest condolences to families of the victims.

Once again, we urge all parties to exercise the utmost restraint. Further deterioration of the security situation may severely impede efforts towards a political solution to the decade-long conflict in Syria. We believe that it remains absolutely crucial to maintain the ceasefire agreement in Idlib and would like to reiterate our support for a nationwide ceasefire as called for by the Secretary-General and his Special Envoy.

Our delegation is also troubled by the information on the activities of various terrorist groups in Syria and would like to stress the importance of counter-terrorism efforts in line with obligations under international law.

With the current impacts of the coronavirus disease pandemic (COVID-19) and the severe economic crisis, the livelihoods of millions of Syrian people remain extremely vulnerable.

The renewal of the cross-border humanitarian assistance mechanism in Syria is crucial. We welcome the adoption of resolution 2533 (2020). We will follow closely the implementation of the resolution and look forward to receiving reports on how this mechanism works vis-à-vis the needs of the people.

Our delegation urges the Syrian Government, which has the primary responsibility to resolve the humanitarian issues in the country, to step up its cooperation with all relevant parties, including the United Nations, to enhance the humanitarian response in various parts of Syria. The most favourable conditions possible for sustained and unimpeded humanitarian access must be created by all relevant parties. We also call on the international community to continue to improve humanitarian support for Syria to address the needs of people on the ground.

In the light of the impacts of the current pandemic, it is essential to ensure that Syria's COVID-19 response capability is not affected by any type of sanctions, in

keeping with the appeal made by the Secretary-General. We also encourage the parties in Syria to cooperate in order to settle the reported situation of detainees and missing persons as well as to create favourable conditions for the return of internally displaced persons and refugees to their homes.

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

On 1 July, a virtual meeting of the summit in Astana format was held to discuss different aspects of the situation in Syria. Following discussions on the latest developments, the Presidents issued a joint statement in which they emphasized their strong commitment to the sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity of Syria; opposed illegitimate self-rule initiatives and separatist agendas; renounced the imposition of unilateral sanctions on Syria; rejected the occupation of the Syrian Golan and condemned the relevant United States decision; considered the Israeli military attacks in Syria as destabilizing and violating its sovereignty and territorial integrity; and reaffirmed their determination to cooperate in eliminating all Security Council-designated terrorist groups.

We once again stress that the sovereignty, political independence, unity and territorial integrity of Syria must be fully respected by all, and that, accordingly, all foreign forces whose presence is not permitted by the Syrian Government must leave the Syrian territory.

A prominent example is the occupation of parts of Syria by United States forces, who are continuing to loot Syrian oil and wealth as well as to support and shield terrorist groups under the mask of combating terrorism.

Similarly, Israel's acts of aggression against Syria are in gross violation of international law and the United Nations Charter, 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 aggressions must come to an end.

The occupation of the Syrian occupied Golan by Israel is illegal, and the recognition by the United States of the Golan's annexation by Israel is null and void. Condemning such unlawful and irresponsible acts, we stress that Golan is and will remain part and parcel of the Syrian territory.

We reiterate our principled position that there is no military solution to the Syrian conflict and that it must be resolved only through a Syrian-led and Syrian-owned, United Nations-facilitated political process.

Underlining that the establishment of the Constitutional Committee is an achievement of the Astana format and welcoming the agreement to hold its next meeting in August, we support the Committee's work. The Committee's activities must continue without any external pressure, and any possible assistance thereto, even by the United Nations, must be extended only at the request of the Committee itself in accordance with its rules of procedure.

We stress once again that the right to determine the future of Syria belongs exclusively to the Syrians. We welcome the successful holding of the recent parliamentary elections in Syria, which is a step forward in this direction.

Today the Syrian people must confront the challenges presented by both the conflict and the coronavirus disease pandemic. However, what is causing the situation to deteriorate is the recent imposition of inhumane unilateral sanctions by the United States against the Syrian people, which is a truly shameful act against a nation that, amid almost a decade-long conflict, is suffering from the coronavirus pandemic.

We strongly condemn this inhumane and irresponsible move by the United States and urge the international community to raise its voice in rejecting this shameful policy and calling for the removal of all these immoral sanctions. The

international community should not leave the Syrian people alone in their struggle to overcome the economic problems resulting from these inhumane sanctions.

We also highlight the need to facilitate the safe and voluntary return of refugees and internally displaced persons to their original places of residence in Syria. Calling for the international community's contribution in this regard, we underline that any such assistance, including for Syria's reconstruction, must not be politicized or linked to the fulfilment of certain conditions.

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

[Original: English and Arabic]

The past few days have seen millions of Syrians cast their votes in the legislative elections that resulted in the election of the members of the People's Assembly to the third legislative session. Those elections stress the commitment of the Syrian people and State to keep the Syrian State institutions working and thwart any foreign agendas aiming to replace those institutions with void and chaos, in a similar manner to what we have witnessed in other countries. The elections are also testimony to the fact that Syria is determined to carry out all constitutional entitlements as well as liberate its territories from terrorism and every illegitimate foreign presence.

It is surprising how the United States and other follower countries issue statements and positions against Syrians exercising their free, democratic and responsible right to elect their representatives. We have not interfered, and will not interfere, in any American or other constitutional entitlements, despite all the defects and irregularities in them. We stress that Syria categorically rejects any foreign interferences aimed at undermining our legitimate elections, sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity, and our independent national decisions.

The approach of the Western States, spearheaded by the so-called co-penholders during the consultations related to resolution 2253 (2015), days ago, as well as their pattern of voting on the draft resolutions proposed by the Russian Federation, expose once again those countries' false humanitarian claims. How can those countries justify their opposition to including in the draft resolution any reference to the catastrophic impacts of the unilateral coercive measures imposed on the Syrian people, even though both the Secretary-General and his Special Envoy, Mr. Geir Pedersen, together with another 44 agencies and entities, have made reference to such impacts? How can they explain their refusal to mandate the Secretariat to submit a report or even information on the consequences of those measures on the lives of Syrians?

The answer is crystal-clear and well known to everyone. Any professional, credible and objective report on the impacts of the coercive unilateral measures on the daily life of millions of Syrians will undoubtedly condemn the policies of the countries imposing those measures. United Nations resolutions are clear in that regard.

Any report will also prove that those countries have flouted the call made by the Secretary-General and his Envoy to Syria to mitigate the impacts of those measures, especially with the spread of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19). That will not be all. If issued, such a report will expose those who call themselves the opposition. These minions of American-Western funding, who serve their personal interests with the aim of filling their pockets, are detached from reality and are nothing but tools used to pass the criminal Caesar Act and the policies of embargo, starvation and deprivation imposed on the Syrian people.

In that regard, my delegation would like to extend thanks and appreciation to the delegations of the Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China for their noble positions derived from the principles of international law and the provisions of the Charter of the United Nations. We would also like to express our thanks to them, as they rejected any violation of Syrian sovereignty under false pretexts.

We believe that all other countries should join us in expressing gratitude, because Russia and China are protecting what was left of the spirit of international law and the provisions of the Charter. Russia and China's positions prevent the recurrence of the crimes of Iraq and Libya's joint invasion by the United States of America and Britain. In that regard, the United Nations should have established independent, impartial and international mechanisms to investigate and hold accountable those responsible for these crimes and to ensure the application of international law to all countries and not to specific countries, as has been the case many times.

Maintaining international peace and security necessitates controlling the raging elephant that is stampeding all over the principles of international law and the provisions of the United Nations Charter, destroying everyone who stands in the way of its reckless steps. What is required today is to put an end to the disregard of international law by those Governments that are hostile towards my country and to other countries and to stop their practices, which are based on the law of the jungle and the law of force instead of the force of law. These are aggressive practices of which my country and other have had to bear the brunt.

How long do we have to wait for the so-called international community to take action and put an end to the crimes of the Erdoğan regime and its operators in NATO? These crimes include the provision of various forms of support to terrorist organizations and proxy separatist militias, and the commission of acts of aggression and occupation, war crimes and crimes against humanity, including killings, destruction, the looting of antiquities, oil and gas, the recruitment of mercenaries, human trafficking, blackmail and the exploitation of the suffering of refugees, the burning of agricultural crops and the imposition of coercive unilateral economic measures on the Syrian people.

Will the Europeans realize, before it is too late for them, that keeping silent about the behaviour of the Turkish regime against my country and many other countries threatens European peace and security themselves and undermines the stability of the Mediterranean and the entire region? The Europeans must realize that Europe's security is directly linked to the security of Syria.

The historical links between Syria and Europe have left their marks on the European identity itself. The name "Europe" is originally the name of the Syrian princess — the daughter of the king of Phoenicia — with whom the Greek god Zeus had fallen in love and subsequently kidnapped to Greece; hence, Europe has its Syrian name.

Some colleagues might not know that the ancient name of the Syrian city Deir ez-Zor, which was ravaged by Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham terrorism and American airstrikes, was originally Dura-Europos; that name is well known to European intellectuals.

I invite my colleagues to look at the 2-euro coin; they will find an engraving of the Syrian princess Auropa.

We also have the right to ask: how do the Council's resolutions explain the latest transgression of the Commander of the United States Central Command, Frank McKenzie, into Syrian territories? Such behaviour is considered to be a violation of Syrian sovereignty and an infiltration without permission from the Syrian Government into the north-eastern region of my country, in coordination with Syrian Democratic Forces militias, and into the occupied Tanf region, which is controlled by American forces and their terrorist tools such as the so-called Maghawir Al-Thawra terrorist group. It seems that McKenzie is fond of the cowboy mentality that does not take into account any law and that conquered the Midwest in the hopes of domination and expansion at the expense of the lives of indigenous peoples.

We listened closely to the statement delivered by Mr. Geir Pedersen, the Special Envoy, and his communication with the head of the Syrian national side on the upcoming meeting of the Constitutional Committee. We hope that all logistical preparations will be timely and fulfil the needs of the national delegation. We also hope that the United Nations will take the required health precautions to protect participants from the spread of COVID-19, in accordance with the rules set by the World Health Organization and the Syrian Ministry of Health.

We believe that the mission of the Special Envoy requires him and the Secretariat to speak out against the Turkish and American interference in Syrian internal affairs. They should also speak out against the coercive measures imposed by the United States and some European countries. Those measures hinder and contradict the task of the Special Envoy, since such economic unilateral measures inhumanely prevent the Syrian people from accessing food and medicine. Anyone claiming that those measures do not have impacts on children, women, the elderly and the rest of the Syrian people is a mere liar.

In conclusion, the success of the political process facilitated by the United Nations with Syrian leadership and ownership requires that the Security Council fulfil its responsibilities and carry out its mandate to ensure full commitment to the sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity of Syria, ending foreign occupation, combating terrorism and ensuring the immediate lifting of the coercive measures imposed on the Syrian people. Achieving this is the basis, essence and goal of any political process, and it is the compass and the goal from which we will not deviate, no matter how great the pressure is or how severe the challenges are.

Other countries have faced aggressive wars similar to the one that my country is facing today. Representatives of those countries are now here in the Council after the triumph of their people and States over injustice, aggression and appalling apartheid.
