



Security Council

Seventy-fourth year

8567th meeting

Thursday, 27 June 2019, 10.45 a.m.

New York

Provisional

<i>President:</i>	Mr. Alotaibi	(Kuwait)
<i>Members:</i>	Belgium	Mr. Pecsteen de Buytswerve
	China	Mr. Ma Zhaoxu
	Côte d'Ivoire	Mr. Moriko
	Dominican Republic	Mr. Singer Weisinger
	Equatorial Guinea	Mrs. Mele Colifa
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Germany	Mr. Heusgen
	Indonesia	Mr. Syihab
	Peru	Mr. Meza-Cuadra
	Poland	Ms. Wronecka
	Russian Federation	Mr. Safronkov
	South Africa	Mr. Matjila
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Ms. Pierce/Mr. Power
	United States of America	Mr. Cohen

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East

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The meeting was called to order at 10.45 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East

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

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Geir Pedersen, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, to participate in this meeting.

Mr. Pedersen is joining today's meeting via video-conference from Geneva.

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

I now give the floor to Mr. Pedersen.

Mr. Pedersen: Let me start with the very worrisome situation in and around the Idlib de-escalation zone. Regrettably, the fighting continues, with reports of air strikes, shelling, rockets and mortar attacks that all too often involve the indiscriminate use of force. Civilians continue to be killed, and hundreds of thousands have been displaced. Front lines have not shifted, at least not significantly.

The Security Council-designated terrorist group Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham is a significant presence within the de-escalation zone. Its attacks must cease. All due protection must be afforded to the up to 3 million civilians in Idlib, many of whom fled there from earlier fighting, and to civilians in the surrounding areas as well. As the Secretary-General said last week, even in the fight against terrorism, there needs to be full compliance with international human rights law and humanitarian law. Strikes against civilians and civilian infrastructure, including de-conflicted health facilities and humanitarian workers, are absolutely unacceptable. They must cease without delay.

Reports of close military exchanges between the Syrian Government and Turkish observation posts are also of grave concern. They remind us that Idlib is not just a humanitarian issue — or is it an issue that is exclusively about Syria — rather, it is a potential powder keg of regional escalation. Undoubtedly, there

is no easy solution for Idlib. But the only way to find one is for hostilities to stop and for key stakeholders to engage in a cooperative approach towards countering terrorism, an approach that safeguards the protection of civilians.

Both Turkey, which I visited earlier in the month, and the Russian Federation, which I will visit next week, have reassured me that they remain committed to the September 2018 memorandum of understanding and have set up a working group. But we must see that assurance reflected on the ground. I strongly reiterate the Secretary-General's appeal to Russia and Turkey to stabilize the situation without delay. We must in fact pursue a nationwide ceasefire, as envisaged in resolution 2254 (2015).

We see the importance of that when we see unrest across Syria. There are exchanges of fire and fatalities in northern rural Aleppo and continued signs of instability in the south-west. The fate of the north-east remains unresolved, which demands a solution. There are immense humanitarian and protection needs across the country, and outside too. There is grinding poverty, exacerbated by commodity shortages and rising prices in many parts of Syria. We have seen a terrible spate of fires ravaging wheat fields and jeopardizing Syria's food security. The internally displaced are acutely vulnerable.

In addition to Idlib, two grave humanitarian situations, in Rukban and Al-Hol, remain at the top of our agenda. Emergency Relief Coordinator Lowcock briefed the Council on this two days ago (see S/PV.8561). Today, my Senior Humanitarian Adviser, Ms. Najat Rochdi, urged the Syria Humanitarian Task Force, here in Geneva, to support the Organization's efforts for humanitarian access, support the protection of civilians and civilian infrastructure and find durable solutions. The current escalation and unrest also send exactly the wrong signal to Syrian refugees. It reinforces only their doubts about the security conditions, conscription and livelihoods in Syria.

We must stabilize the situation in Idlib. If that is achieved, we must then avoid the risk of a no-war/no-peace scenario — with front lines mostly frozen but periodic conflict and unrest lingering and five international armies in perpetual risk of confrontation; with the continual violation of Syria's sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence; with internally displaced persons and refugees still not returning, at

least not in any critical mass; with the tragedy of the detained, abducted and missing still unresolved; with a strengthened insurgency of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant, with terrorist groups and foreign fighters still regrouping and posing a challenge; and still no political solution.

We all agree that there is no military solution to this conflict. I have sought to revive a Syrian-led and -owned political process based on resolution 2254 (2015). An immediate priority has been to launch a credible, balanced and inclusive Syrian-led and -owned United Nations-facilitated constitutional committee that fully respects Syria's sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity, if at all possible. That has been a key item in my sustained dialogue with the two parties — the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic and the opposition Syrian Negotiation Commission. I have also ensured the continued support for a common way forward among the Sochi conveners and others, including the small group, which I saw in Paris earlier this week. The Secretary-General himself discussed the issue with the Russian leadership during his recent trip to Saint Petersburg.

I believe the path to concluding the constitutional committee's composition and the rules of procedure may now be open. In my upcoming engagements, I look forward to testing directly whether a formula that I have been careful to ensure has the buy-in of all can advance the establishment of the committee. I appreciate recent engagement by senior Russian officials to support the efforts of the United Nations. I look forward to consultations with the Government in Damascus in the near future and with the leadership of the Syrian Negotiation Commission. It is time to finalize outstanding issues to enable the United Nations to facilitate the work of the constitutional committee in Geneva. The constitutional committee can indeed open doors, but it will not alone solve the conflict or the challenges facing Syria. That can come about only if we begin to see real trust and confidence developing via tangible and reciprocal steps, including on the ground.

I strongly believe that progress on detainees, abductees and missing persons, if done in a meaningful way and at a meaningful scale, could make a large impact. I have prioritized action on the unilateral release of women, children, the sick and elderly. Improving access to information and communication is another step. The Government and the opposition should compile and consolidate lists of individuals

they hold, have information on or seek. Deputy Special Envoy Khawla Matar and I will continue to engage in earnest on this very difficult but critical file. In parallel, we will also continue to press Russia, Turkey and Iran — countries participating with us in the working group on this issue — to exert the efforts needed to try to achieve more concrete results on this file. My invitation for the working group to hold its next meeting in Geneva stands.

In truth, a series of steps will be needed if a cycle of trust and confidence is to develop. That has been impressed upon me by Syrians from many walks of life. I have met with many civil society actors and networks recently, including through the Civil Society Support Room. All of the Syrians, from both inside and outside and irrespective of their political orientations or backgrounds, are eager — even desperate — for a political solution. But it strikes me that they do not really believe that a real process that could lead to a solution is likely.

This week, I also engaged with the Syrian Women's Advisory Board, which met in Geneva to deepen its understanding of how constitutional processes can protect and advance women's rights. They and many others stress the critical importance of a constitutional committee made up of at least 30 per cent women. But they too emphasized their lack of faith that Syrians, men and women, have in the political process.

This is why a political process must be about more than just meeting in Geneva. It must include concrete actions on the ground to inspire trust and confidence. I will therefore continue to intensively consult a wider spectrum of Syrians on what they see as practical and constructive entry points for trust-building actions.

But ultimately, of course, it falls upon the parties to take those actions. Unblocking the impasse will be difficult. There is much mistrust. Positions are entrenched. But I believe that international discussions and cooperation can help Syrians overcome these obstacles. That is not to undermine the Syrian-led and -owned nature of the process. It is simply a recognition of the extent of international involvement in Syria and the centrality of international support for any viable future for the country. Real steps on the ground could and should see national actions too. That would build trust and confidence among Syrians and between Syria and the international community.

At present, no currently active international grouping brings together all key international players, whose support can guarantee concrete and reciprocal steps across all dimensions. I believe my efforts would be helped by bringing together the will embodied in the Astana format, the small group format and the permanent membership of the Council. That is why I continue to work on inviting a group of key players to a common forum to support a Syrian-led and -owned process in Geneva in a very practical way.

Tomorrow, at the Group of 20 Summit, world leaders will have many items on their agenda. The Secretary-General and I have urged that Syria should be high among them. We hope that Russia and Turkey can work at the highest level to stabilize the situation in Idlib. We also hope that Russia and the United States can build on recent talks and deepen their dialogue, because cooperation between them will be a key element for international cooperation on Syria. Finally, we hope that cooperation can be built in a way that all other key players are involved in supporting a Syrian-led and -owned process facilitated by the United Nations in the discharge of its Council mandate.

Since the beginning of my tenure, the Council has offered its full support for my mission, and I have greatly appreciated that. Six months into the job, I appreciate just how complex and difficult it is, but I also see the possibilities to chart a path out of this conflict.

It is now time for the Idlib situation to be stabilized and a nationwide ceasefire pursued. It is in fact past time to launch a constitutional committee. It is also time to try to develop a climate of confidence-building measures, and we clearly need renewed international support. These are the kinds of actions that would signal that we are at least moving along a political path that is in keeping with resolution 2254 (2015) — through a constitutional committee unfolding in a safe, calm and neutral environment, paving the way for free and fair United Nations-supervised elections, as envisaged in the resolution, and a lasting political settlement.

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

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

Mr. Cohen (United States of America): I thank Mr. Pedersen for his briefing.

The United Nations-led political process in Geneva is the only legitimate and internationally recognized forum to create a lasting, inclusive and peaceful political solution to the conflict in Syria. Three and a half years ago, in resolution 2254 (2015), the Security Council established a blueprint for a peaceful political transition: a new constitution, elections and a nationwide ceasefire. The United States will not accept any attempt by the Al-Assad regime and its allies to use military means in Idlib, or elsewhere, to undercut, circumvent or further delay Special Envoy Pedersen's efforts aimed at maintaining the political process.

Nor can we, the members of the Security Council, afford any further delays by the regime to implement resolution 2254 (2015). The regime's escalation of attacks on civilian areas, facilities and humanitarian actors, including yesterday's attack on an ambulance carrying White Helmet volunteers, shows that the Al-Assad regime still believes force will make a solution to the conflict attainable, as Damascus actively seeks to avoid negotiating a political solution with representatives of the Syrian opposition.

Time and again Syria and Russia have given assurances to uphold ceasefires, adhere to reconciliation agreements and advance the political process. However, those assurances have repeatedly been broken and disregarded. The lack of a political solution continues to put civilian lives at risk.

The Council must acknowledge that the Astana group's efforts to advance the political process have failed. Seventeen months after the launch of negotiations at Sochi on forming a constitutional committee, it is time to admit that not only has progress stalled, it is likely to remain out of reach for some time, because that is where the regime wants it to be — out of reach. The time has come for the Council to encourage Special Envoy Pedersen to try other routes to achieving the political solution laid out in resolution 2254 (2015), by focusing on preparing for nationwide elections, with the participation of an estimated 5 million Syrian refugees and observed by the United Nations, by securing the release of detainees and by establishing a nationwide ceasefire.

The fate of the United Nations political process, resolution 2254 (2015) and the lives of millions of Syrian civilians depend on whether or not the regime and Russia will work with Turkey to stop further attacks in north-west Syria and immediately return to

the ceasefire lines agreed in the 2018 Sochi agreement. Idlib must not become another Aleppo, and the United States believes that progress on the political front and a genuine de-escalation is still possible, but it requires the Al-Assad regime to recognize that a healthy political system must accommodate more than one view.

At this stage we see two paths for Idlib. The first path is bloody and sadly familiar. The continued vain quest for a military solution is undermining both security and humanitarian conditions, with the United Nations once again struggling to respond to the needs of innocent civilians. Thousands — perhaps hundreds of thousands — of people will flee Idlib and turn north to Turkey, or west into the Mediterranean, jump-starting a second migration crisis that destabilizes the wider region.

The second path is that Idlib and its 3 million civilian residents are protected by a permanent ceasefire agreed between the parties on the ground and endorsed by the unanimous support of the Security Council. Such a cessation of violence would create momentum and a positive political environment in which to launch a political process.

The United States believes that the reinvigoration of the political process in Syria can and should start with a verifiable ceasefire in Idlib and northern Hama. Groups on the ground, including Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham, Russia and the Al-Assad regime must immediately cease military operations and return to the original lines of the 2018 Sochi ceasefire agreement. Not one more shot should be fired, no more barrel bombs should be dropped and no more air strikes should be launched. Turkey should be entrusted to remove terrorist forces from the region, consistent with the 2018 Sochi agreement, and the final status of Idlib should be negotiated between the parties, mediated by the United Nations, as part of the political process in line with resolution 2254 (2015) once a ceasefire is in place. In the meantime, as the United Nations lets Syria political-track negotiations continue, the people of Idlib would administer themselves and be granted access to humanitarian aid deliveries, as enumerated under resolution 2449 (2018).

The United States recognizes that there is no path forward without the cooperation of Russia and the Al-Assad regime. Therefore, the United States calls upon Russia to de-escalate its military operations, press the regime to do the same and engage with the United

States in a step-by-step process to implement resolution 2254 (2015) that will result in the final stabilization of Idlib and Syria writ large. Until the Al-Assad regime and Russia take concrete steps towards a full, immediate and verifiable de-escalation in Idlib, the United States will continue to apply diplomatic and economic pressure through all available means to isolate the regime and its allies. Our preference is to work together on a step-by-step approach. But make no mistake: the United States will seek any and every opportunity to ratchet up our pressure on the regime and its supporters if political progress on the humanitarian and political tracks continues to stall. Our resolve is clear and unwavering.

I planned to end my remarks at this point, but I would like to take just a moment to react to the statement of the speaker who addressed the Council under rule 37 on 25 June (see S/PV.8561). It is a privilege to address the Security Council — for each of us — and it always should be treated as such. The disrespect bordering on contempt that he showed the Council is unacceptable and begs a response. First, procedurally, the representative in question consistently shows a lack of respect by abusing our time, exceeding the five minutes recommended by presidential note S/2017/507 every time he speaks, by 10 or 20 or more minutes. Two days ago, he tried to assert a procedural position, demonstrating a lack of knowledge about Council rules, when our colleague from the United Kingdom made a point of order regarding his outrageous and dangerous claims.

Beyond the procedural points, he tried to assert that humanitarian workers were somehow complicit in terrorism, that civilians in areas where terrorists are present are not entitled to humanitarian assistance or medical care, and that the schools and hospitals in those areas are by extension legitimate military targets, which they clearly are not. It is outrageous that this representative, whose Government has repeatedly used chemical weapons on its own civilians, prevents humanitarian assistance from reaching its needy and violates international norms and international law by intentionally targeting hospitals, schools and ambulances, would seek to lecture the Security Council on the Geneva Conventions, applications of Security Council resolutions or the rule of law.

Moreover, his vilification of David Lillie and the cannot go unanswered by the United States or the Security Council. A humanitarian who has risked his life over and over again to help the needy on the basis

of humanitarian principle does not deserve to have a diplomat from a region like this one, who has sat out the trauma of his own country's civil war in the comfort of New York, or for that matter anyone, question his bona fides. The allegation that the Syrian American Medical Society is a branch of the United States Government simply because the United States is one of many countries contributing funds to the organization is both offensive and ludicrous. The United States funds over 20 per cent of the cost of this Organization. That does not make the Secretary-General an employee of the United States Government, or the Security Council a United States Government body, any more than funding from the United States Government makes the Syrian American Medical Society an entity of the United States Government, or Mr. Lillie an employee of the United States Government. That was a shameful attack on a humanitarian, particularly in a meeting where the Syrian representative had no problem accepting a humanitarian briefing from a Russian general in military fatigues who has been helping prosecute the war.

Finally, his contention that a non-Syrian has no right to brief on Syria would disqualify most briefers whom the Security Council has heard since its founding. The United States cannot let this twisted logic go unanswered. We reject the Syrian representative's 25 June statement during the Syria humanitarian briefing and urge other Council members to do so as well. It is an affront to this organ and the rules-based international order.

Ms. Pierce (United Kingdom): I thank the Special Envoy and his team. What they do remains absolutely vital, however hard pounding it is on the ground.

I will start, if I may, with Idlib, where the Special Envoy started. We had a big debate about this earlier in the week (see S/PV.8561), so I will not rehearse all those points. But I think the fact that the indiscriminate use of force continues ought to worry everybody on the Security Council.

There are violations of the Geneva Conventions and international humanitarian law going on. I asked a number of questions. Those questions remain unanswered. I looked at the Russian general's statement. The questions are still unanswered, so I will return to them at the next humanitarian briefing.

However, at this particular moment, I want echo what the Special Envoy said in his appeal for all parties

to stabilize the situation and implement resolution 2254 (2015), including the nationwide ceasefire. We need to keep that goal right at the forefront of our minds. I also take this opportunity to echo the United States representative with regard to what we heard from the Syrian representative in the meeting on Idlib (see S/PV.8553). We have discussed the length of statements and the working methods here in the Council. This is therefore not the time to rehearse that. I think, however, that it does mean that we need another discussion about it.

I want to pick up on the point about attacking humanitarian workers. Their jobs are dangerous enough, and they do those jobs because recognized institutional services or a country's own services are unable or unwilling to help. Therefore, as I said in the previous meeting, they deserve our protection, as well as our thanks.

Turning to the political process, I hope that the Special Envoy knows that he has the United Kingdom's full support. We are very interested in the contact group being able to meet. I think that it is a necessary first step towards trying to make faster progress on resolution 2254 (2015). I therefore hope that all the people whom the Special Envoy is trying to bring together would approach that in the spirit of constructiveness and good faith. We support his efforts in the United Nations-led Geneva process. It is the only the legitimate forum. We welcome the holding of the meeting in Geneva. It is necessary but not sufficient. As he said, we also need progress on the ground. I hope that the Group of 20 will be able to discuss it and find a way forward.

None of that is to detract from the fact that we support the political process being Syrian-owned and Syrian-led, with United Nations facilitation. The Special Envoy is absolutely right to say that progress cannot be made without that sort of facilitation. I believe that there is still a very big question about the Syrian Government's commitment to the political process, as, month after month, we see the prevarications with regard to the constitutional committee continue. If progress cannot be made, then I really do agree with the United States representative and would encourage the Special Envoy — who alluded to this himself — to try other routes leading towards achieving the political solution set out in resolution 2254 (2015). For good reason, we have all become very focused on the constitutional committee, but the bigger prize is resolution 2254 (2015), which includes preparing for

nationwide elections observed by the United Nations, securing the release of detainees and establishing the nationwide ceasefire.

I note that, unless there is progress on the ground that is meaningful to ordinary citizens, a political process will not prosper. That means the Syrian Government stopping the repression throughout the country — in former opposition areas that it now controls. It means stopping arbitrary detention, conscription and discrimination.

We understand that, only last week, the Syrian authorities issued death certificates for more than 700 Syrians who died in detention in Hamah, and, according to reports from Syrians for Truth and Justice, families have not received the bodies of their loved ones, nor have they received information about the circumstances of their deaths or the location of their burials. That is therefore a serious hindrance for the people of Syria to being able to have confidence in their own future.

In addition, there is a real sense that the Syrian authorities are holding their own people to ransom. It also affects and impacts on conditions for the return of refugees and fails to create the conditions required for a stable economy so that Syria eventually can become a normal country once again. It fails to give people the chance to engage in the decisions that govern their lives, and it fails to give them the right to live those lives free of violence and fear.

Once again, let me conclude by appealing to the Syrian authorities to come to the table and engage more speedily and positively with the Special Envoy.

Mr. Delattre (France) (*spoke in French*): I thank Special Envoy Geir Pedersen for his clear and precise briefing on the issues and challenges of his mediation efforts. I reiterate France's full support to him.

I will stress today the need to silence the weapons in Syria permanently and without delay so as to enable us to move towards a credible political process.

Our number-one priority must be to address Idlib, where the pursuit of the regime and its allies' offensive is dangerously undermining the Special Envoy's efforts to revive the political process. That is the position that was reiterated by the 28 States members of the European Union in their statement on Idlib issued today. In the face of recent tragedies taking place in the north-western part of Syria, we must spare no effort to prevent Idlib from becoming a new Aleppo. The lives

of 3 million people, including 1 million children, are at stake.

The particularly poignant testimony of the representative of the Syrian American Medical Society on Tuesday (see S/PV.8561), reminded us that humanitarian and medical staff and infrastructure continue to be targeted. We condemn in the strongest terms the most recent deliberate attack on an ambulance yesterday in Al-Bara, which killed two humanitarian personnel from the White Helmets, in flagrant violation of international humanitarian law. In such tragic circumstances, it is particularly odious that the regime claims that humanitarian workers are working in collusion with terrorist organizations, while they carry out their work at such a high risk when far too often it is at the cost of their own lives.

I also underscore the particular responsibility of Russia, whose air support is necessary to the regime's pursuit of its offensive. Combating terrorism is not the only justification for that offensive, which primarily affects the civilian population and infrastructure. The fight against those terrorist groups listed by the Security Council remains a priority for France, but it cannot be carried out in violation of international humanitarian law.

We therefore reiterate our call on Russia to reaffirm its commitment to the ceasefire and put pressure on the regime without further delay to stop the fighting, in particular with a view to enabling the establishment of a nationwide ceasefire. That is imperative in order for the political process to move forward smoothly.

In the north-east, we must pursue our efforts to completely and permanently eradicate the threat of Da'esh and stabilize the region. That was the message conveyed unanimously by the political directors of the international coalition against Da'esh who met in Paris on 25 June. To that end, France has also decided to allocate an additional €50 million for Syria, which will be mainly dedicated to the north-east.

In that regard, I recall the urgent need to make progress on the political front in order to forge a meaningful prospect for achieving peace and reconciliation. Our shared responsibility is to support the Special Envoy in advancing all aspects of resolution 2254 (2015). The Special Envoy enjoys our full support in bringing together the various international stakeholders around the same table, which, in our view, is a necessary condition for moving forward. He also

has our full support for quickly finalizing a credible and balanced constitutional package that addresses the composition and procedural rules of the constitutional committee. However, we regret that no progress has been made in that regard. It is clear who remains responsible for that. The Syrian regime refuses every compromise and is stepping up delaying tactics to prevent that first opportunity for dialogue from succeeding. It is incumbent on the Special Envoy to tell us frankly when he believes that he has exhausted all possible ways to achieve an agreement on the committee. If the regime maintains its opposition, it will be time for the Council to draw the necessary conclusions and to consider other ways to make progress.

In this respect, the establishment of confidence-building measures conducive to the creation of a safe and neutral environment is vital. This will require, *inter alia*, progress on the issue of detainees and missing persons, United Nations access to refugees and displaced persons who are returning home, and commitments by the regime to the safety of individuals and the return of their properties.

Lastly, I would like to record the importance of the subject of elections with a view to the upcoming polling. We must begin to reflect, based on resolution 2254 (2015), on the conditions necessary to ensure that the elections are free and fair; that all Syrians, including displaced persons and refugees, can participate; and that the United Nations will be involved in supervising the process. The Special Envoy here again has our full support to make headway in this respect.

To resolve the Syrian tragedy, the Syrians need to be given the chance to freely express their views once again about the future of their country.

As we all know, only a political solution based on resolution 2254 (2015) will allow for Syria to be stabilized once and for all, for the lasting eradication of hotbeds of terrorism and for the return of refugees in safe and dignified conditions. France will continue its mobilization to that end during the upcoming international meetings, which we hope will allow for progress to be made.

We once again call on Russia, which has particular responsibility in this area, to bring pressure to bear on the regime to restore the ceasefire and to obtain commitments from it for the relaunch of a comprehensive political process. Without credible political progress, our position on reconstruction,

sanctions and normalization, which is also the position of the European Union, will remain unchanged.

It would be a serious error of judgment but also a serious political failure to consider that the Syrian tragedy is behind us. Faced with the new, incipient tragedy in Idlib, based on a scenario that we have seen time and again, no one will be able to say that they have been caught off guard. But it would be another error of judgment and another political error to think that the path of peace is out of reach. We are all convinced of the opposite: that we can create the conditions to open up a credible political process, build on our common ground and once and for all bring peace to Syria. There is not a minute to lose; it is this pressing appeal that I make today on behalf of France.

Mr. Ma Zhaoxu (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): First of all, I would like to thank Special Envoy Pedersen for his briefing and commend him on his recent mediation efforts. We support his continued efforts, under resolution 2254 (2015), to facilitate a political solution to the Syrian issue.

Today I wish to focus on three points about how to promote the political process.

First, promoting the political process is the only way forward to solve the Syrian problem. The establishment of a representative constitutional committee that is accepted by all parties is the most realistic channel for the launch of a political process in Syria. In April, the Syrian parties reached an understanding in the twelfth round of the Astana talks on the decision-making mechanisms of the constitutional committee and its rules of procedure.

At the same time, in terms of the establishment of the committee, there are a few outstanding issues. China supports Special Envoy Pedersen's efforts in this regard to continue mediation and maintain close communication with all parties. We also support the continued role of the Astana process.

Secondly, a sustainable political process requires a secure and stable external environment. China supports strengthened cooperation between Russia and Turkey with the aim of continuing the implementation of their memorandum of understanding on Idlib. The scourge of terrorism poses a major threat to the political process and could lead to irreversible consequences for the process and the future of the country. The international community should, in accordance with

the relevant Council resolutions and international law, harmonize its standards and crack down resolutely on all terrorist groups.

Thirdly, the future and destiny of Syria ultimately lie in the hands of the Syrian people. In promoting a political solution, we should abide by the Syrian-led, Syrian-owned principle, and the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of Syria must be fully respected.

China is ready to work with the Security Council to enhance our support for the efforts of the United Nations to facilitate gradual progress in the Syrian political process.

Mr. Moriko (Côte d'Ivoire) (*spoke in French*): My delegation would like to congratulate Mr. Geir Pedersen, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, on his detailed briefing on the political process in the Syrian Arab Republic.

Côte d'Ivoire reiterates its deep commitment to dialogue as the best way to settle disputes in general and in the Syrian conflict in particular, as part of an inclusive political process that enjoys the support of the international community. We support all initiatives aimed at creating the conditions for a fruitful dialogue between the parties to the conflict with the aim of restoring peace and stability in Syria and creating the conditions for shared prosperity.

In this respect, my delegation welcomes the holding on 16 and 17 May in Ankara of the meeting of the joint working group on the situation in Idlib, and it calls on the Astana guarantors to continue their efforts to ensure that the parties to the conflict respect the ceasefire. We welcome the decision by Moscow and Ankara to meet on the margins of the upcoming Group of Twenty summit on 28 and 29 June in Osaka to assess their efforts to relaunch the political process.

Côte d'Ivoire is of the view that actions that aim to give new momentum to the process of resolving the crisis must be supported by measures to restore and build confidence between the parties to the conflict. Here it encourages the joint working group and the Syrian parties to continue their cooperation in the context of the process that allowed for the reciprocal release of detainees in November 2018 and February and April 2019.

The resumption of fighting in Idlib Governorate and its grave consequences for an already disastrous

humanitarian situation is a source of concern for Côte d'Ivoire. It is undeniable that a lasting settlement of the Syrian crisis will create the conditions necessary to better address the disastrous humanitarian situation and thereby help to provide relief for populations in distress.

In this context, my delegation recalls that it is the primary responsibility of the parties to the conflict under international humanitarian law to create an environment conducive to the safe, rapid, unimpeded and sustainable delivery of humanitarian assistance, including in Idlib Governorate.

To conclude, Côte d'Ivoire would like to reiterate its full support for the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General, Mr. Geir Pedersen. It encourages him to continue his tireless mediation efforts to achieve a political solution to the Syrian conflict, in accordance with the relevant provisions of resolution 2254 (2015).

Ms. Wronecka (Poland): At the outset, let me thank Special Envoy Geir Pedersen for his comprehensive and insightful briefing. I would like to assure him of our full support.

As we heard two days ago from Under-Secretary-General Mark Lowcock, the humanitarian situation in Syria is unacceptable. The impact of the hostilities in the north-west of the country is difficult to imagine. Allow me here to echo the comments made by my United States and United Kingdom colleagues on the important role of humanitarian workers and to express our appreciation to and thank them, as I did a few days ago, for their tireless efforts on the ground in Syria.

We must prevent further military hostilities, which have disastrous humanitarian consequences. That is the only path towards a sustainable peace agreement. The lives of 3 million civilians, including children, are at stake. Once again, we call for ensuring that the de-escalation zone in Idlib, as agreed in the memorandum of understanding between Russia and Turkey, is effectively restored and fully respected.

It must be emphasized that the political process has continued to fail to gain traction. That includes the establishment of the constitutional committee, which is the first step towards a genuine political process under United Nations supervision. Launching a lasting political process should be of the utmost importance and the Security Council should provide support to that endeavour.

We have an international framework to support the intra-Syrian political process: resolution 2254 (2015) and the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex). All necessary elements of the political process under United Nations supervision are clearly indicated. The resolution demands that all parties immediately cease any attacks against civilian targets. It urges all Member States to support efforts to achieve a ceasefire and requests the United Nations to convene the parties to engage in formal negotiations.

Let me underline that the success of that action requires the full and constructive engagement of all parties to the conflict. It can succeed only if the Syrian authorities participate in the negotiations in good faith and without preconditions. Sustainable peace in Syria can be guaranteed only by an intra-Syrian framework political agreement, as the political transition will be Syrian-led. One element in that process should be free and fair elections, held under United Nations supervision.

Let me also briefly touch on the very important issue of accountability for war crimes. We urge all parties to the conflict to condemn arbitrary detention, hostage-taking and forced disappearances and to protect humanitarian workers and journalists.

In conclusion, I would like to reiterate the European Union common position on the reconstruction of Syria. We will be ready to assist in the reconstruction of Syria only when a comprehensive, genuine and inclusive political transition, negotiated by the Syrian parties to the conflict on the basis of resolution 2254 (2015) and the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex), is firmly under way.

As we fully support the safe return of Syrian refugees who have fled their homes, we also believe that a durable solution should ensure the security of a sustainable, dignified and voluntary return of Syrians to their country of origin, in accordance with international law and the principle of non-refoulement.

Mr. Matjila (South Africa): Allow me to congratulate you, Mr. President, on the distinguished manner in which you have presided over the Council for the past month. I would also like to thank Mr. Geir Pedersen, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, for his briefing on the status of the political process in the country.

South Africa wishes to reiterate that the only sustainable solution to the conflict in Syria is a

comprehensive political one that emanates from an inclusive Syrian-led dialogue. That process should be aimed at achieving a political transition that reflects the will of the Syrian people with guaranteed protection for all groups of Syrian society. My delegation appreciates and supports Mr. Pedersen and his team in their continued engagement and diplomatic efforts in building trust among the various parties, including civil society and women's groups, and we welcome the progress that he has made thus far. Without trust, there can be no progress.

South Africa calls on the Council to unite towards the full implementation of resolution 2254 (2015) as the blueprint for a long-term political solution in Syria.

In addition to the Special Envoy's efforts to engage with all Syrian stakeholders, my delegation supports the Special Envoy in his efforts to establish a common forum with the aim of supporting a common purpose for peace in Syria. That would be an opportunity to revitalize broad-based international cooperation and to support the Geneva processes, including the finalization of the constitutional committee, with a minimum of 30 per cent representation of women.

As many speakers stated earlier this week during the humanitarian briefing (see S/PV.8561), the escalation of violence, particularly in north-western Syria, undermines the efforts made in the political process and further aggravates the dire humanitarian situation in the country. The perpetuation of such acts has had an increasingly destabilizing impact on the wider region through the displacement of thousands of people, the exacerbation of political and sectarian differences and the potential to spread extremism beyond Syria's borders.

The political and humanitarian situations in Syria cannot be addressed independently of each other. An escalation of violence and the deterioration of the humanitarian situation negatively affect the political progress. In the same vein, progress in the political sphere will support efforts towards ensuring that all Syrians can live in a safe, secure and prosperous environment, free of violence and terrorism.

Peace, stability and democracy are unassailable rights of the Syrian people. The international community should fully support the political processes towards long-term peace in Syria as a matter of priority and continue to support the United Nations, including the Special Envoy, as well as other mediation efforts

aimed at resolving the conflict. It is the Council's responsibility to ensure that there is political progress and a return to normality in Syria.

In conclusion, South Africa reiterates its position that the annexation of any territory seized through force is invalid under international law and calls on Israel to withdraw from occupied territories. As many speakers have previously stated, the need to uphold and respect international law is essential to restoring long-term peace and stability in the Middle East. In that regard, we call on all parties to uphold and respect their international obligations if they expect the same from other countries.

Mr. Meza-Cuadra (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): We too would like to begin by congratulating you, Mr. President, on the outstanding way in which you have presided over our work during the month of June. We are grateful for the convening of this meeting and thank Mr. Pedersen for his comprehensive briefing. We acknowledge his hard work to promote sustainable peace in Syria. We therefore reaffirm our commitment to the success of his term.

Peru looks forward to the important meetings being held between the Special Envoy and various parties, and between high-level authorities of international stakeholders in the Syrian conflict, helping to find points of convergence towards establishing a constitutional committee that can be recognized as legitimate, balanced and consistent with the provisions of resolution 2254 (2015) and the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex).

We specifically emphasize the urgent need to make tangible progress on crucial issues, such as the representative membership of the committee, the decision-making process within it and its mandate, and to ensure that those efforts lead to free United Nations-supervised elections.

We note that further delays on such issues are unacceptable given their real impact on the credibility of the process, especially as it is 17 months since the Sochi congress. In that connection, we consider it essential that the parties continue to work on measures that foster a better climate of understanding, including the release of detainees, the identification of missing persons and the delivery of mortal remains. We welcome the work that is being done in that regard within the Astana framework, but we note the need for more substantial progress.

We should also emphasize the importance of avoiding escalations of the conflict that could undermine the prospects for reaching a political solution. In the current circumstances, it is crucial to preserve the agreement on Idlib between Turkey and the Russian Federation. We condemn the violations of international humanitarian law that have been happening. The fight against terrorism is no excuse for non-compliance with such international obligations. Another major challenge is addressing the grave situation that millions of refugees and internally displaced persons are enduring, which requires mustering not only the financial resources but, more importantly, the political will necessary to guarantee them a safe and dignified return within internationally accepted parameters.

We are at a critical juncture where rapid action at the political level is vital. The efforts in that regard should be aimed primarily at avoiding the country's further fragmentation and achieving long-term stability, taking into account the strategic and geopolitical considerations that have largely fuelled the conflict in Syria, especially when the main priority is protecting the millions of people who are in such a terribly vulnerable situation.

Mr. Safronkov (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): First of all, Sir, we very much appreciate your work as President of the Security Council, as well as the efforts of the entire Kuwaiti team. We also thank Special Envoy Pedersen for his briefing. We share the views he expressed and support his efforts to achieve a lasting settlement in Syria. It is crucial that he has been able to establish and maintain an ongoing and constructive dialogue with all of the parties involved and is working to bring their positions closer together on both the regional and international fronts.

Russia is working actively to advance the political process and restore confidence between the key parties within and around Syria. We are collaborating diligently with our Astana format partners, Iran and Turkey, while staying in constant contact with the Special Envoy and coordinating with Syria's Government and opposition.

On 25 June Major General Bakin, the Head of the Russian Reconciliation Centre, gave the Security Council a thorough briefing on the military and political situation in Syria (see S/PV.8561), which we found extremely useful and informative, with exhaustive answers to many of the questions that have been raised in the Council. Members should familiarize themselves

with it. The Russian representative gave particular attention in his statement to the situation in the Idlib de-escalation zone. There can be no denying that militias from the terrorist group Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham, which is essentially the Al-Nusra Front, have not stopped their provocative attacks on Syrian Armed Forces positions, the country's civilian population and the Russian air base at Khmeimim. Urging or demanding that we do nothing in this situation is at the very least dishonest, especially when Major General has confirmed that our military operations are directed exclusively at targets that have been confirmed by intelligence. We are not harming the civilian population or humanitarian infrastructure in any way.

We are concerned about the fact that the Al-Nusra Front's members are trying to refashion themselves into a moderate opposition. We all know very well that rebranding does not mean refraining from terrorist activities. Their content remains the same and the fight against terrorist organizations that have been recognized as such by the Security Council — by all of us, unanimously — must continue. The Astana guarantors are determined to fully implement the agreements on stabilizing Idlib and are actively cooperating to that end with Syria, Iran and Turkey. We are scrupulously implementing the memorandum that we drafted, agreed on and signed in Sochi. Instead of demanding that we implement what we ourselves agreed on and signed, it would be better for everyone to get involved in the fight against terrorism. That would be a real contribution to achieving the Syrian settlement.

We are seriously concerned about the situation in north-eastern Syria. Ensuring stability and security in this area will be possible only if it is based on respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the country and the rejection of separatist plans that undermine the national security of Syria and its neighbours. Generally speaking, it is baffling that on the one hand we are being asked to provide more information and details about what is going on, and then, when we invite our representative — who is working in the country and carrying out important national reconciliation tasks — to brief the Council, that briefing is suddenly questioned. In fact, it was questioned before it had even been delivered, and by countries that are illegally occupying Syria and violating its sovereignty and territorial integrity.

We hope that we will soon be able to achieve a breakthrough in the launch of the constitutional

committee. Russia's representatives have been holding intensive consultations on the subject in the past few days, with the opposition and other stakeholders involved in the conflict as well as the Syrian authorities. It goes without saying that the strategic aim of launching a full-fledged political process in Geneva under the auspices of the United Nations and Special Envoy Pedersen, based on resolution 2254 (2015), is unchanged.

I have emphasized that in spite of the situation that has been whipped up, often artificially, including in today's Council meeting, we remain optimistic about future developments in the Syrian Arab Republic, because we are working fully in accordance with international law. We are in Syria at the invitation of the legitimate Government. It is clear that, as the situation in Syria is normalized, the main hotbeds of terrorism are eliminated and the country is restored to peace, the problems of post-conflict recovery and the provision of humanitarian assistance will come to the fore. Humanitarian aid must be provided to all Syrians throughout Syria, without preconditions. It is important to provide assistance for Syria's reconstruction in strict compliance with the norms of international humanitarian law and the principles of neutrality and impartiality, without bias and in cooperation with the central authorities. We must work to create the conditions needed to support the safe and voluntary return of refugees and internally displaced persons to their homes in Syria. However, there was detailed information about this in Major General Bakin's briefing (see S/PV.8561), so I would once again ask Council members to read it carefully.

We urge everyone to once and for all reject unilateral sanctions, which only exacerbate the humanitarian situation in Syria. Its citizens are suffering in large part because of those restrictions, and Syria is experiencing serious problems in its health-care, fuel and energy sectors. Russia will continue to provide Syria with comprehensive support on issues regarding the reconstruction of infrastructure and the delivery of humanitarian assistance, both bilaterally and internationally, including through the United Nations system.

We again underscore that Syria was, is and will remain a key State in the Middle East and an integral part of the Arab world. It cannot be artificially ripped from the broader regional context for the sake of circumstantial expediency. In that regard, we support returning Damascus to the Arab family as

soon as possible, which will enable the restoration, normalization and improvement of relations among Arabs and in the situation in the Middle East as a whole. Incidentally, that is a natural and objective process that is progressing despite resistance from outside.

It is high time that many of our colleagues took another look at their outdated approaches to the Syrian issue, which have been overtaken by history. It is time to abandon the pressure, the attempts at isolation and the open flirtations with illegal armed groups, which easily change their loyalties and are not ashamed to cooperate with outright terrorists. Has history really taught our colleagues nothing? We need only look at the destruction of statehood that has resulted from illegitimate outside interventions in various Arab States.

We call on everyone interested in restoring peace to Syria to engage constructively with our efforts. We can end the war and focus on the issues of the political process and national reconciliation, which Mr. Pedersen is actively working on. Together we can guarantee the rights of the minorities, including the Christians who have lived in the Middle East for thousands of years. The situation in Syria and the Middle East requires a comprehensive approach. Establishing international cooperation requires a decisive rejection of policies of escalation and a switch from confrontation to dialogue and cooperation, and I want to emphasize once again that that applies to Syria, Iran and other countries in the region.

Mr. Pecsteen de Buytswerve (Belgium) (*spoke in French*): I would first like to thank Special Envoy Geir Pedersen for his briefing and commitment.

Since the start of the conflict nine years ago, violence has claimed the lives of tens of thousands of civilians. Syria and its people have witnessed some of the most serious crimes under international law. Millions of Syrians have left their country and are still abroad to this day. Thousands of Syrians await signs of life from relatives who have been arbitrarily detained or are missing. It was against that backdrop that the Special Envoy took up his duties a few months ago. The situation has deteriorated even further since the end of April, owing to the escalation of violence in Idlib. As we all know, that has created a situation could be disastrous for Syria and the region on both the humanitarian and regional security fronts. In that regard, I would like to recall the statement made by the representative of Germany on behalf of the co-penholders on Tuesday

(see S/PV.8561). We reiterate that the parties to the conflict have an obligation to protect civilians and respect the principles of distinction and proportionality in international humanitarian law. As Ms. DiCarlo mentioned last week,

“Our unflagging efforts to find a political solution that meets the legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people cannot move forward in an environment of open conflict” (*S/PV.8553, p.2*).

We urge the parties to reaffirm their full commitment to the ceasefire agreements of the Russia-Turkey memorandum signed on 17 September 2018 and reiterate our call for a nationwide cessation of hostilities. We call on all stakeholders to take advantage of every opportunity there may be to achieve a lasting solution, including on the sidelines of the forthcoming Group of 20 meeting.

There is no military solution to the Syrian crisis. It was clear from the start and remains so more than eight years later. The only possible solution is a political one. In my country’s view, the constitutional committee must be Syrian-owned and -led and facilitated by the United Nations. We support the important role of the Special Envoy in its establishment. However, only the creation of a credible constitutional committee can demonstrate the political will of the parties to the conflict to work constructively towards a solution to the crisis. What is needed is a balanced and inclusive committee that represents all elements of Syrian society, with clear working procedures. It seems to us that despite all the diplomatic efforts, the process is moving too slowly. We must redouble our efforts. It is time for the crisis to end.

The peace that the Syrian people are waiting for is outlined in resolution 2254 (2015) and the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex). We support the efforts of the Special Envoy to implement the resolution by establishing a nationwide ceasefire, a political transition through free and fair national elections that the Syrian diaspora can participate in, and the building of a safe, stable and peaceful environment.

Lastly, we must not forget the millions of Syrians who continue to be subjected to arbitrary arrest and detention. We encourage the Special Envoy to continue his efforts on that important issue.

Mr. Syihab (Indonesia): At the outset, I would like to express my delegation’s sincere thanks and gratitude to you, Mr. President, and to the entire Kuwaiti

delegation for presiding so effectively over the Council during the month of June. Of course, we would also like to thank Special Envoy Pedersen for his comprehensive briefing. My delegation really appreciates his hard work in engaging with the various parties to the conflict.

Two days ago, during the Syria humanitarian briefing (see S/PV.8561), Indonesia stressed that we cannot let the escalation in north-western Syria continue to undermine the Special Envoy's efforts to reinvigorate the political process, as the Secretary-General stated in his report (S/2019/508). Respecting the ceasefire and de-escalating tensions must therefore be the main priority. Much is at stake. At this juncture, the Council must provide its strong support to the ongoing work on establishing a constitutional committee, within the framework of the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex) and resolution 2254 (2015). In that regard, Indonesia would like to focus on three points related to advancing the Syrian political process:

First, we want to reiterate the key words "Syrian-led and Syrian-owned". They should not be merely the catchphrase in every Council meeting on Syria but the main foundation that guides us in the entire process of finding an inclusive political solution, with full respect for the country's sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity. That is obviously easier said than done.

That brings me to my second point. While we recognize the obvious challenge, it is critical to sustain open lines of communication between the relevant parties and to establish and nurture confidence. The Council must create an atmosphere that is conducive to sustained negotiations. We therefore welcome Special Envoy Pedersen's efforts, with the support of key countries, to finalize the composition and terms of reference of the constitutional committee. Indonesia is fully aware that a constitutional committee is not the only objective. However, a first meeting of members of the committee in Geneva would definitely be a first tangible step in unlocking the door for political process in Syria and would also send a strong and positive signal not only to the international community but most importantly to the Syrian people.

Lastly, I want to highlight the importance of compromise and urge all sides to avoid any actions, activities or statements that could obstruct the political process. It has been a painful and prolonged conflict. Any delays on the political front will only bring more

suffering to the Syrian people and cost more lives. Indonesia fully believes that as long as we promote peaceful ways rather than violence, and dialogue rather than confrontation, we will be able to achieve our end goal. In that context, we appreciate the crucial role of the Astana guarantors on both the political and humanitarian fronts in seeking a peaceful solution to the conflict. The Council might also want to consider the possibility of having a closer, informal discussion with the guarantors in order to pursue a more tangible road map on the future of the ceasefire agreement. Again, much is at stake.

Mr. Singer Weisinger (Dominican Republic) (*spoke in Spanish*): We appreciate the briefing given today by Mr. Geir Pedersen, who can count on our full support. Of course, I would also like to thank you, Mr. President, for your masterful steering of the work of the Council. We congratulate you and your entire team on your presidency. The Dominican Republic welcomes the efforts to bring the relevant actors in the political process closer and to build bridges between them, and we commend the broad consultations conducted in the framework of the quest for an inclusive and sustainable political solution to the conflict in Syria.

As a guarantor of the full implementation of resolution 2254 (2015), the Council is called on to ensure that the conditions that make a comprehensive, credible, revitalized and inclusive peace process viable and founded on the confidence of the entire Syrian population are preserved. That includes the millions of refugees who are out of the country and who will eventually return. However, it is impossible to build trust when the civilian population is still living in conditions of uncertainty, unrest and insecurity, and when so many families are separated without information about the fate of their relatives. The Dominican Republic understands that the combination of all these elements makes the political process even more fragile, and we emphasize that the Council must do everything to ensure the protection of the civilian population throughout Syria. It is therefore imperative to insist on the need for all parties to the conflict to comply with international humanitarian law and the protection of civilians. Measures to stop attacks on civil infrastructure, such as hospitals and schools, must be taken immediately.

While it is still not enough, we acknowledge the progress that has been made on forming the constitutional committee. We believe it is essential to make progress

on designating the outstanding names, outlining the rules of procedure and establishing a concrete mandate for the committee's work. We hope that a solid agreement on those key aspects of the process will be reached at the upcoming consultations. We believe it is crucial to ensure that all those arrangements are fully aligned with the provisions of resolution 2254 (2015) and that they promote the consolidation of the United Nations as facilitator of the process. We reiterate the importance of including specific provisions to ensure the active and meaningful participation of women at every stage, not in parallel or as contributors, but as entities with their own voices at the negotiation and decision-making table. In that regard, we urge the parties to exercise the greatest possible degree of flexibility and constructiveness in the consultations and not to lose sight of the need to alleviate the suffering of a people battered by years of conflict and to chart their course towards a new future.

In conclusion, we firmly believe that the goal proposed by resolution 2254 (2015), of promoting a broad political process that culminates in the holding of free, transparent and fair elections under the supervision of the United Nations, is still achievable. Despite the exhaustion that all of us who want a peaceful and sustainable solution to this crisis certainly feel, we must keep this legitimate aspiration alive and undertake all the necessary efforts to build the political will that the current situation deserves and achieve agreements in every area.

Mrs. Mele Colifa (Equatorial Guinea) (*spoke in Spanish*): I would first like to thank you, Mr. President, for convening this meeting. I also thank Mr. Geir Pedersen, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, for the updated and very useful information he has given us.

The worsening humanitarian situation, exacerbated by the renewed hostilities between the parties to the conflict in north-west Syria, should serve to spur the international community to join forces to make a peaceful outcome to this crisis possible. As we have said many times, we know that there is still much to be done in Syria. As we search for ways to put an end to the terrorist groups operating in Idlib and in the nearby towns, on the basis of the Russian-Turkish agreement, we must focus on fully stabilizing the situation on the ground and promoting a political solution based on resolution 2254 (2015). There can be no question that we must be utterly determined in our efforts to accelerate the establishment of the constitutional

committee if we are to truly launch the political process that can put an end to this protracted conflict. Equatorial Guinea welcomes all of the Special Envoy's initiatives and efforts focused on supporting the five priority objectives of his mandate, in accordance with resolution 2254 (2015).

Apart from the discussions on the establishment of a constitutional committee and the beginning of its work, it is essential to ensure that none of the parties undermines the efforts of the Special Envoy to revitalize the political process or turn these efforts into an obstacle. In that regard, we encourage the parties to be resolute in prioritizing approaches with a significant degree of convergence, and to ramp up their diplomatic meetings and frank discussions. We must be objective and recognize that there is no longer room for eventualities or expectations. The constitutional committee should be formed as soon as possible. Moreover, Equatorial Guinea hopes that the consultations on Syria to be held next month in Nur-Sultan will serve to open the way decisively to the beginning of the work of the committee.

I conclude by again encouraging the Special Envoy to continue considering all opportunities to overcome the obstacles hindering the establishment of the committee and to stress that only a broad, inclusive political solution that is led by the Syrian Arab Republic, in conformity with resolution 2254 (2015), and meets the legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people can pave the way to sustainable peace in Syria and put an end to the unimaginable suffering that the Syrians have endured for far too long.

Mr. Heusgen (Germany): I too would like to thank you, Sir, for your presidency. I cannot do so in as dignified a way as Ambassador Matjila did, but I mean it. I was very happy to find when I entered the Chamber this morning that you had the curtains open. I see that they are closed again. I do not know if that is due to pressure from the Secretariat or to the very sombre subject on today's agenda.

Before I come to the substance of my statement, let me comment a bit on what United States Ambassador Cohen said with regard to the Syrian representative. I can only fully support what he said, but at the same time I have to ask him: "What do you expect? What do you expect from the representative of a Government that bombs its own citizens, that drops barrel bombs and chemical weapons indiscriminately on its own

citizens? What do you expect from the representative of a Government that puts its people in prisons where they are subjected to torture and death? The photos of Syrian prisons that we have all seen are about the worst we have ever seen. What do you expect from the representative of a Government that continuously bombs humanitarian aid workers and says that White Helmets and humanitarians are terrorists?" That is something that we totally object to and reject, but we are not that surprised.

What I was more surprised by was what the Russian representative just said. He said that the approach we are taking here — the approach of putting emphasis on human rights and international humanitarian law; of seeking a political solution; of not accepting sexual violence against women — is an outdated approach. I do not want my children to grow up in a world like that which he imagines. I want my children to grow up in a world where humanitarian law and human rights are respected, where we look for a political solution and where we do not bomb indiscriminately.

Let me come to the point. Again, I fully support what Geir Pedersen said and subscribe to the way forward. I can also only echo his concern with regard to the military offensive in north-western Syria. It is unacceptable that there continues to be indiscriminate air strikes, shelling and barrel bombs. Again, we are seeing the deaths of innocent civilians. In the fight against terrorism, nothing justifies the indiscriminate bombing of civilians or attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure. Anyone who does not believe me should talk to Mr. Voronkov, the Russian Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism. He clearly says that respect for human rights is key in the fight against terrorism.

The Russian representative said earlier that all aerial attacks are against intelligence-confirmed targets. What kind of intelligence is being used when clearly identified cars, belonging to humanitarian aid workers and carrying patients from another attack, are bombed and killed by the Syrians or their allies on their way to the hospital? Are these targeted killings? Are these intelligence-confirmed targets? What happens to the pilots when they come back to the base? Are they decorated, or do they go to court?

So, there is no military solution; there is only a political solution. All parties must comply with resolution 2254 (2015) and the Geneva communiqué

(S/2012/522, annex). Geir Pedersen works very hard and is working on the 3+3 or 4+2 formulas. I must say that when one looks at the paragraphs of the various agreements, it is not that important whether we are using the 4+2 or 3+3 formula, because a two-thirds majority, I believe, is needed to take action. So, in the end, that is only a technical move.

If our Russian friends would only — for one, two or three days — agree to stop their military support and intelligence until the Syrian Government agrees to a certain formula and consents to go to Geneva, that would happen right away. I can only say what Mr. Pedersen does — that Geneva has to be supported and that the political process has to advance. There can be no military solution. Even if the Syrian regime decides to try to kill everybody in Idlib, there can be no military solution. There has to be a political solution. Geneva is one element, but the other necessary element in Syria is reconciliation. That is only possible if there is an end to the arbitrary arrests, killings, torture, sexual violence, disappearances and denials of humanitarian assistance. Only then will the return of refugees be possible.

I say to our Russian colleague that we will work for the preservation of sanctions as long as the Syrian regime does not change its brutal behaviour against its own population. The sanctions are not outdated; we want to preserve them as long as necessary. We welcome the fact that the Arab family is not welcoming Syria back as a member of the League of Arab States, but is keeping the regime out. We very much appreciate that the League is upholding the values that I spoke of at the beginning of my intervention.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I shall now make a statement in my national capacity.

I would like to begin by thanking Special Envoy Geir Pedersen for his valuable briefing on the political track in Syria. I take this opportunity to reaffirm the full support of the State of Kuwait for Mr. Pedersen's efforts to revive the Syrian political process. We call on all parties to support the Special Envoy and work to help him fully discharge his mandate.

We reaffirm that there is no military solution to the Syrian crisis. The only solution is a just political settlement that is facilitated by the United Nations and Syrian-led and Syrian-owned, in conformity with resolution 2254 (2015) and the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex). That resolution sets forth the various steps that are to be taken during the political

transition phase, including the drafting of a new constitution and the holding of free and fair elections that include, under the constitution, all Syrians inside and outside the country, with United Nations supervision. In that context, we reaffirm the need for the constitutional committee to be balanced, inclusive and credible. We hope that the beginning of its work will pave the way for the long-awaited political process.

We have been following closely and with concern the military escalation of recent weeks in the north-west of Syria, which has led to the displacement of nearly 350,000 people, and attacks on civilian infrastructure, including hospitals and schools, resulting in casualties among innocent civilians. We once again condemn the targeting of innocent civilians by any perpetrator and recall the need for all parties to respect international humanitarian law and international human rights law. We also condemn all attacks on civilian-populated areas waged by terrorist groups, including those listed on the Security Council sanctions list. At the same time, we recall that anti-terrorism operations in no way exempt any party to a conflict from its obligations under international law, including its duty to abide by the principles of distinguishing targets, proportionality, precaution and protecting civilians and civilian targets. Even wars have rules that must be respected.

As military actions continue in north-west Syria, we express our concern over their effects and repercussions on the political process. We reaffirm the importance of the memorandum of understanding between Turkey and Russia and call for its implementation. We also call for the implementation of confidence-building measures between the parties, including making progress on detainees, prisoners and disappeared persons. We recall that this month the Security Council unanimously adopted resolution 2474 (2019), on persons reported missing during armed conflict. The resolution was the first of its kind and must be implemented on the ground. Its provisions must also be implemented in all conflicts throughout the world, including in Syria. We emphasize that it will be impossible to achieve a lasting and comprehensive peace in Syria without justice and ensuring that there is no impunity for those who have committed the most heinous crimes since the start of the Syrian crisis in 2011.

In conclusion, we reiterate that this conflict must be settled peacefully, in line with resolution 2254 (2015), in order to enable the Syrian people to fulfil their legitimate aspirations through a political

settlement that covers all segments of Syrian society and preserves the unity, independence and sovereignty of Syria. Indeed, since we are speaking of sovereignty, we reiterate that the Golan is Syrian Arab territory occupied by Israel, the occupying Power. The seizure and annexation by force of territories have been rejected and are in contravention of the Charter of the United Nations, the principles of international law and the relevant resolutions of the Security Council, including resolution 497 (1981).

I now resume my functions as President of the Security Council.

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

Mr. Ja'afari (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to welcome the Special Envoy and wish him every success in carrying out his mandate.

I will make just a few remarks. I will not speak at length, so as not to derail the discussion. Today, we are discussing the political track, not the humanitarian track. I will therefore not comment at length on some remarks that pertain to a previous meeting that was held on the humanitarian situation (see S/PV.8561). Nonetheless, my country strongly believes in multilateral diplomacy. That is why we were one of the founding States of this international Organization. We emerged victorious over those who would violate international law. Accordingly, when we speak from a political and diplomatic perspective, we speak out of our belief in international law.

The Security Council is not a private-sector entity owned by one Member State. It is not a store where the owner selects its clientele. The Council is responsible for the maintenance of international peace and security — nothing more, nothing less. We are not here to personalize or politicize issues according to our whims. It is normal not to agree sometimes, but disagreement has to be expressed according to norms, and, as they say in English, we go by the book. I would remind my dear friend, the representative of the United States of America, that our book is the Charter of the United Nations and the provisions of international law.

How would the Council react if some country were to establish the Mexican-American Syrian-Iraqi Medical Society — call it whatever you wish — and send it to the border between the United States and

Mexico, without the approval of or coordination with the United States Government, to care for the Guatemalan refugees who are drowning in the river there on a daily basis? We have read that story in the *New York Times*. Is that international law? Is that respect for the Charter? Humanitarian work requires that the law be respected.

The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs is working in Syria with the approval of the Syrian Government. Its work is purely humanitarian. There are 27 international non-governmental organizations operating in Syria with the approval of the Syrian Government, but it is unacceptable for certain countries to send intelligence groups to Syria across the border with Turkey under the pretext of doing humanitarian work. We need to draw the attention of the Council to this particular fact.

We objected to our dear colleague the representative of Britain when she interrupted me while delivering my statement because her act was not in line with the rules and procedures. Any representative who wishes to interrupt another representative has to go through the presidency. We do not keep interrupting each other as if we were in a circus. We have to show some respect for each other, even if we disagree politically. I did not object to the fact that my British colleague wanted to take the floor to make a point of order, but she should have done so in accordance with the proper procedures by asking the President to give her the floor.

The utter silence of the Security Council after Israel's more than 50 years of occupation of the Syrian Golan — and I thank you, Mr. President, for concluding your statement with a reference to the Golan — has encouraged the United States Administration to attempt to backtrack on the provisions of resolution 497 (1981), which declared the decision of Israel, as the occupying Power, according to the description commonly used at the United Nations, to impose its laws, administration and authority on the Golan to be null and void and without international legal effect. This attempted backtracking is embodied in the recognition by Donald Trump, the President of the United States of America, of Israeli sovereignty over the occupied Syrian Golan, ignoring the commitment of all previous United States Administrations to upholding the provisions of resolution 497 (1981).

Naturally, this utter silence has encouraged the Israeli occupying entity to continue its occupation for decades with impunity, protected and encouraged by

the United States of America and a number of other Member States. Israel has continued to occupy Arab territories, confiscate our lands, expand settlements and reverse itself on its commitment to a just and comprehensive peace, pushing the region towards war in an unprecedented manner. The Israeli occupation has formed an alliance with the takfiri terrorist herds, providing multifaceted support to these takfiri terrorist gangs in the area of separation and committing various aggressions against my country to boost the morale of these terrorist groups.

In this context, I would like to briefly comment on the remarks of my colleague the representative of Germany, in which he said that we accuse those humanitarian workers of terrorism. Yes, we do. When his country and other Western countries smuggled White Helmets from the Syrian occupied Golan into Jordan and then to Western capitals, this reaffirms that those groups are terrorists. What were they doing in the area of separation in the Golan? That area has troops belonging to the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force, and terrorists are prohibited from being there. Why did those Governments, including the Government of Germany, receive those terrorists who were smuggled from the area of separation in the Golan? Why did they not go through Turkey, Jordan or Lebanon? They are terrorists.

The United States-Israeli position, which disregards international law and United Nations resolutions, does not stop there. Israel has escalated tensions by announcing recently the creation of a new settlement in the occupied Syrian Golan, named Trump Heights. That is how Israel has rewarded the President of the United States for violating the Security Council's resolutions and the provisions of international law by recognizing Israel's sovereignty over the Syrian Golan. In order to complete the series of provocations, which have been repeatedly condemned by the Council, of continued violations of international law and of illegal settlements by the occupying Power, the American President responded to the Israeli announcement by saying, "Thank you, Mr. Prime Minister, for this great honour". It is a great honour that Israel announces the creation of a settlement in the occupied Syrian Golan called Trump Heights. The United States President responds by expressing his thanks for that great honour. It is as if he were expressing his happiness that a residential compound had been added to his worldwide real estate collection, while ignoring the fact that the

settlement will be established on Syrian occupied land, of which neither Trump nor anyone else has the right to dispose.

The Council's silence has encouraged senior United Nations officials to shirk their obligations pursuant to their mandate, which we, the Member States, conferred upon them. United Nations officials are supposed to only follow the United Nations agenda. They are responsible before us for fully undertaking their functions. Some members of the Council might say that the Permanent Representative of the Syrian Arab Republic is unjustly accusing senior United Nations officials and that this is not allowed in this Chamber.

No, I am not falsely accusing anyone. I have the best proof, which is the fact that the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Nickolay Mladenov, continues to act beyond the limits of his mission and mandate. In his briefings, he continues to provocatively avoid, in a manner that can no longer be tolerated, discussing the situation in the occupied Syrian Golan, while he fails to point out the position of the United Nations with regard to the occupation, despite dozens of relevant resolutions adopted by the international Organization, in particular the Security Council. In his periodic briefings to the Council, he deliberately does not discuss Israel's continued illegal practices and violations in the occupied Syrian Golan.

I will provide the Council with the following example. In his most recent briefing on the situation in the Middle East, on 20 June (see S/PV.8557), Mladenov failed to note that the Government of the Israeli occupation held a meeting in the Golan on 16 June and that on the same day it announced the establishment of a new settlement in the Golan, to be named Trump Heights. However, he was quite forthcoming with regard to the details concerning a goat that had crossed the separation line into part of the occupied Syrian Golan. In addition, his colleagues, senior United Nations officials, were quite forthcoming with regard to raising the issue of the Syrian authorities granting one visa entry here and denying another one there. That is all they talk about when discussing the situation in the Middle East — a goat crossing the separation line from the Syrian side and the issue of entry visas. But Mladenov never heard of the establishment of Trump Heights in the Golan.

Attempts to perpetuate the Israeli occupation throughout the past years have coincided with the

sponsorship by major Western States of terrorism, extremist ideologies and attempts to replace spiritual with political Islam, which has nothing to do with sacred Islam. After having been abandoned by Europe and seen his dream of joining the European Union vanish, Erdoğan now looks to his neighbours to the east and south so as to enhance the illusions of reviving the Ottoman Sultanate and colonial ambitions that will never come to fruition. Erdoğan believed that his illusion of reviving the caliphate could come true, especially after a number of political Islamic leaders took power in certain Arab States and much blood was shed with unprecedented destruction, which some people praised as the advent of the Arab Spring. He therefore got involved with a major terrorist project targeting the destruction of Syria, opening his country's borders with us and facilitating the passage of thousands of foreign terrorists into Syria, after having provided them with training camps and all kinds of weapons and logistical support. Subsequently, he even launched a direct military offensive against my country and occupied part of our territory.

All of this could be described as an assassination, masterminded by certain countries, of the Charter of the United Nations and the principles of international law. As members know, this was preceded by scores of other assassinations committed by the same countries, resulting in the disasters in Viet Nam, the former Yugoslavia, Somalia, Iraq, Libya, Yemen and many other countries in Africa and Latin America, witnessed by all humankind. Those disasters have led to the killing and displacement of tens of millions of people, while those countries incurred trillions of dollars in economic losses. Therefore, the only way for our Organization to avoid meeting the same fate as the League of Nations is to ensure that countries abide by the Council's resolutions and the provisions of the Charter, in particular paragraphs 1, 4 and 7 of Article 2, which provide for the principle of sovereign equality of all States and for all Members to refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any State. In addition, the Charter has no provision allowing countries to intervene in the internal affairs of other countries.

An awakening, an acknowledgment of guilt — or *mea culpa*, as they say in English — and a return to those noble principles would guarantee the unity of the Council and its defence of the provisions of the Charter

and give the necessary impetus and support to the work of the Special Envoy and to serious parties that have sought to reach a political settlement to the crisis in my country, Syria, and have coordinated efforts to combat terrorism.

My country's Government affirms that it stands ready to cooperate with the Special Envoy to make his mission a success as he facilitates the Syrian-led and Syrian-owned intra-Syrian dialogue to move forward on the political track. That is first and foremost in the interest of Syria rather than any other party. My country also emphasizes that what is happening in Syria cannot be reduced to a mere disagreement on names and procedures in the context of the formation of the constitutional committee, despite its importance. There is a much larger picture at stake, as the issue of the constitutional committee is just the tip of an iceberg that is kilometres-deep.

In conclusion, without the concerted efforts of all, without support for the Syrian Government to eradicate terrorism, without ending the illegal foreign presence throughout Syria and unilateral economic measures, and without effectively maintaining the unity, sovereignty and independence of Syria, any political track that

does not take all of that into account would remain an unrealistic and hopeless solution. When we speak of effectively maintaining the unity, sovereignty and independence of Syria, as I and many other colleagues have said, that is part of the Council's function and mandate. These concepts are in line with the provisions of the Charter and the Council's resolutions pertaining to Syria.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): The representative of the United Kingdom has asked for the floor to make a further comment.

Mr. Power (United Kingdom): Obviously, again and as we have often said in the Council, there are far too many inaccuracies in the Syrian representative's statement to go into any detail, but since he mentioned us I wanted to speak in reply to remind him that we were given the floor to speak on a point of order yesterday (see S/PV.8561) to object to his persistent naming of humanitarian workers as terrorists, which we find disrespectful to the Council. Furthermore, I would point out that the length of his intervention and remarks today further undermine his disrespect for the Council.

The meeting rose at 12.40 p.m.