



Security Council

Seventy-fifth year

8700th meeting
Friday, 10 January 2020, 3 p.m.
New York

Provisional

<i>President:</i>	Mr. Dang	(Viet Nam)
<i>Members:</i>	Belgium	Mr. Pecsteen de Buytswerve
	China	Mr. Zhang Jun
	Dominican Republic	Mr. Singer Weisinger
	Estonia	Mr. Jürgenson
	France	Mrs. Gueguen
	Germany	Mr. Heusgen
	Indonesia	Mr. Syihab
	Niger	Mr. A Barry
	Russian Federation	Mr. Nebenzia
	Saint Vincent and the Grenadines	Ms. King
	South Africa	Mr. Van Shalkwyk
	Tunisia	Mr. Baati
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Ms. Pierce
	United States of America	Mrs. Craft

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East

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20-00806 (E)



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The meeting was called to order at 6.05 p.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East

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

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

Members of the Council have before them documents S/2020/24 and S/2020/25, each of which contains the text of a draft resolution.

The Council is ready to proceed to the vote on the draft resolutions before it.

I now call on those members of the Council who wish to make statements before the voting.

Mr. Nebenzia (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): The Russian Federation should like to propose an oral amendment to paragraph 6 of the draft resolution contained in document S/2020/24. We propose that the words

(*spoke in English*)

“and in accordance with the humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence”

be deleted from the current text and replaced with the following phrase:

“and in accordance with the guiding principles of humanitarian emergency assistance, as contained in United Nations General Assembly resolution 46/182”.

Mr. Pecsteen de Buytswerve (Belgium): I shall make this statement on behalf of Germany and Belgium, the humanitarian co-penholders.

Millions of Syrians continue to be in need of humanitarian assistance and protection. We all know the numbers — 11 million Syrians need humanitarian assistance. These are essential and critical needs: food, water, shelter, medical assistance and care. Since 2014, cross-border operations have offered a true lifeline to the Syrian people. The mechanism continues to allow

the United Nations and its implementing partners to ensure life-saving assistance that reaches around 4 million Syrians.

Since 14 November, the humanitarian co-penholders have done their utmost to find agreement on a draft resolution to renew the mechanism. We have done this in good faith and in an inclusive, transparent and thorough manner, with all Council members and also consulting neighbouring countries. We have followed a clear humanitarian imperative. It is the fate of those 4 million people that has been our exclusive motivation.

As was clearly demonstrated by the voting on 20 December 2019 (see S/PV.8697), the divisions among various Council members run deep. We have since continued to engage with all parties, aiming to keep the bar high. Three crossings are at the very heart of this mandate; they are the bottom line from a humanitarian perspective. Yet, over and over again, it has been made clear that a mandate including all three crossings is not acceptable to all members. The crossing point of Al-Yarubiyah, in the north-east of Syria, has provided medical aid to 1.4 million people. Today, there is no viable alternative to that crossing point.

We deeply deplore the fact that we could not come to an agreement to keep that crossing point, which the United Nations and humanitarian partners deem essential to the work. Our text requests the Secretary-General to examine alternatives by the end of February in order to ensure that humanitarian aid can be provided throughout the country, including in the north-east.

Today is the last day of the current mandate. In the north-west, where military escalation continues, 2.7 million people completely depend on the mechanism. Therefore, the co-penholders now propose a text that allows for humanitarian aid to continue to reach those people in dire need. We thank all delegations that have constructively and actively contributed to the text.

The amendment orally proposed by the Russian Federation is, however, not acceptable because it contradicts the very system of the cross-border mechanism, which is in itself an exception to the principles that were mentioned by the representative of the Russian Federation. This system is needed more than ever. We need to preserve it. We now ask the Council to approve the draft resolution as presented by the co-penholders and to vote in favour of it.

The President: Rule 36 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure states, inter alia, the following:

“[W]hen an amendment adds to or deletes from the text of a motion or draft resolution, that amendment shall be voted on first”.

Accordingly, I intend to put the proposed oral amendment to the vote first.

I shall now put to the vote the oral amendment proposed by the Russian Federation.

A vote was taken by show of hands.

In favour:

China, Russian Federation, Viet Nam

Against:

Belgium, Dominican Republic, Estonia, France, Germany, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United States of America

Abstaining:

Indonesia, Niger, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, South Africa, Tunisia

The President: The proposed oral amendment received three votes in favour, seven against and five abstentions. The proposed oral amendment has not been adopted, having failed to obtain the required number of votes.

I shall now put to the vote the draft resolution contained in document S/2020/24, submitted by Belgium and Germany.

A vote was taken by show of hands.

In favour:

Belgium, Dominican Republic, Estonia, France, Germany, Indonesia, Niger, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, South Africa, Tunisia, Viet Nam

Against:

None

Abstaining:

China, Russian Federation, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United States of America

The President: The draft resolution received 11 votes in favour, none against and 4 abstentions. The draft resolution is adopted as resolution 2504 (2020).

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

Mrs. Gueguen (France) (spoke in French): It was essential that the cross-border humanitarian assistance mechanism for Syria be renewed today, when it was set to expire. France deeply regrets that resolution 2504 (2020), which we have just adopted, reduces its scope from four crossing points to two and from a duration of 12 months to a duration of only 6.

The Secretary-General, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, humanitarian agencies and the countries of the region have repeatedly emphasized that today there is no alternative to this mechanism, on which the lives of 4 million Syrians depend. Why? Because the Syrian regime continues to instrumentalize aid to populations in need for political purposes, in defiance of international humanitarian law and humanitarian principles, by granting authorizations one at a time, by selecting beneficiaries and by diverting assistance. That has not changed in recent months.

It should also be remembered that every day, cross-border humanitarian aid makes it possible to bring vital assistance to 2.7 million people in the north-west and 1.3 million people in the north-east of Syria. Without that aid, those millions of people would depend entirely on the Damascus regime, rather than the United Nations and humanitarian actors, and would find themselves at its mercy.

There can be no ambiguity about the fact that the mechanism that we have just renewed is in no way dependent on the consent of the Syrian regime. That has been the very *raison d'être* of the binding decisions that our Council has been adopting since 2014, and it remains so to this day. France has engaged in good faith and actively in the negotiations conducted by the co-penholders, whose efforts and willingness to find intelligent compromises I commend. We have communicated tirelessly, pragmatically, with all stakeholders to preserve the mechanism in all its components.

We deeply regret that the Al-Yarubiyah crossing point could not be maintained. This point is of crucial importance because it allows 40 per cent of medicines to be transported to the north-east — medicines that cannot reach that region via convoys from Damascus. We regret that the World Health Organization is now unable to transport the convoy of 8 to 10 trucks that was planned for the coming weeks.

While the overwhelming majority of the Council supported the renewal in its entirety of this vital

mechanism for north-western and north-eastern Syria through the maintenance of the authorization of passage through Al-Yarubiyah, Russia has again yielded to the demands of a criminal regime. That indicates disregard for the human lives that are at stake. It is also to disregard the principles of neutrality, humanity, independence and impartiality of humanitarian aid, which must be able to reach everyone, whatever side they are on, by the most direct and effective means. Russia's intransigence on this point is morally and humanly incomprehensible and unacceptable.

The mandate that the Security Council has just conferred on the Secretary-General to put forward by the end of February options making it possible to deliver humanitarian aid, including medicines, to the north-east is vital in this context. We call on everyone, above all Russia, to act responsibly and to take at that time a decision that draws on the consequences of the analysis of the options to put forward by the Secretary-General.

We also deplore the fact that the mechanism has been renewed for only six months and not 12, although humanitarian operations require predictability and stability in order to be prepared and conducted effectively and sustainably. It is urgent that the political process get back on track, but we must also put an end to the instrumentalization of humanitarian assistance. The survival of millions of Syrians depends on this.

Mr. Pecsteen de Buyswerve (Belgium) (*spoke in French*): We would like to thank all the members of the Council that voted in favour of resolution 2504 (2020). As I said earlier, the text is a compromise one that will make it possible to continue humanitarian assistance in the north-west of Syria, where there is no alternative way of receiving such humanitarian assistance. As the Council is aware, the system functions on the basis of a simple notification to the Syrian authorities. This is an important signal for the Syrian people.

Along with Germany and numerous other delegations around this table, we had hoped for and worked extremely hard to achieve a more far-reaching result, a mandate for all persons who depend on the mechanism. We are therefore extremely disappointed at and deeply regret the fact that the Council was not able to achieve such a result on a resolution that is purely humanitarian in nature. We call on the Syrian authorities to respect international humanitarian law, protect their citizens and enable the delivery of humanitarian

assistance throughout the whole of the territory in a neutral manner and without any impediments.

Mr. Baati (Tunisia) (*spoke in Arabic*): I would like to express my delegation's satisfaction at the adoption by the Council today of resolution 2504 (2020), on the extension of cross-border humanitarian assistance in Syria. I wish to commend the efforts of the humanitarian co-penholders during their discussions, drafting and consultations with the membership of the Council, and with those who contributed to the achievement of a text that would enable the Council to break the deadlock.

Tunisia supported the extension of the cross-border humanitarian assistance mechanism in a framework of consensus. It is our responsibility in the Council to save lives and alleviate the human suffering of those in need in Syria. We must demonstrate a united front so that we will not fail them. It is true that we did not adopt the resolution unanimously, but we believe that we were able to guarantee the continued delivery of humanitarian assistance to those in need in Syria, and that is what matters to us.

We stress that putting an end to the humanitarian suffering of the brotherly people of Syria will require a lasting and comprehensive ceasefire there as well as urgent efforts towards a political settlement in the context of an inclusive intra-Syrian dialogue, under the auspices of the United Nations and in accordance with resolution 2254 (2015).

Mr. Singer Weisinger (Dominican Republic) (*spoke in Spanish*): The Dominican Republic voted in favour of resolution 2504 (2020), submitted by the co-penholders, for the renewal of the cross-border humanitarian assistance mechanism in the Syrian Arab Republic. Despite the fact that we have been able to maintain the mechanism, we cannot fail to highlight a few aspects thereof.

First, the elimination of two important crossings, Al-Yarubiyah and Al-Ramtha, based on political rather than humanitarian motivations should definitely prompt us to think about this issue very carefully. The Dominican Republic voted in favour of the draft resolution despite the possible consequences that could arise from that decision because we believe that even operating on a partial basis, the mechanism can still save the lives of millions of people.

We wish to conclude by acknowledging the flexibility shown by delegations in the Council, and we

would ask that later, when we address this item once again, we keep at the forefront of our concerns the need to help the Syrian people as directly as possible and, on the basis of dialogue and in the framework of multilateralism, meet our collective commitment to defending and protecting at all costs the most vulnerable populations.

Mr. Jürgenson (Estonia): At the outset, I should like to thank the co-penholders for the immense amount of work they did and their persistence in truly fighting for the maintenance of the cross-border humanitarian mechanism first established by resolution 2165 (2014) more than five years ago.

Belgium and Germany and, earlier, Kuwait worked closely to reach an outcome that aims to support Syrian civilians across the country. Over five years, millions of Syrians have received vital assistance. For that work, we thank the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and other United Nations agencies that despite hardships have continued to provide life-saving and life-sustaining aid to the people in urgent need inside Syria.

Despite the numerous compromises made, the text provided by the co-penholders is a jump into the unknown. Even though the Al-Yarubiyah crossing is mentioned in the text, its future remains unclear. But what is even more important is that our colleagues leading these efforts did not resort to short-term political gains; instead, they put lives first — the lives of the Syrian people.

At the same time, the Russian Federation did not engage in any serious discussion or offer any alternatives that would have granted humanitarian access to the north-east of Syria in a sustainable way.

Taking this all into account, Estonia voted today with a heavy heart. We supported resolution 2504 (2020) in order to save millions of lives in Idlib, but we strongly voice our discontent at the way in which this result was achieved; instead of cooperation, the preferred means of negotiation by the Russian Federation were blackmail and presenting other parties with ultimatums.

Finally, I would like to reiterate that the last-minute amendments to the resolution in no way change the principles of the mechanism that have existed thus far, and deliveries of humanitarian aid do not require the consent of the Syrian authorities.

Mr. Zhang Jun (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): China attaches great importance to the humanitarian situation in Syria and supports the international community in stepping up humanitarian assistance to the Syrian people. It also supports the work of the United Nations in the area of humanitarian assistance in Syria. China, too, has provided a great deal of assistance to Syria through multilateral and bilateral channels and is committed to improving the humanitarian situation there.

China has always had reservations regarding the establishment of a Syrian cross-border humanitarian assistance mechanism. We have consistently advocated that in taking any action, the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the country concerned and the will of its Government must be respected. Cross-border humanitarian assistance is a special relief method adopted under specific circumstances. It should be evaluated and adjusted in a timely manner in line with developments on the ground. The Syrian Government bears the primary responsibility for improving the humanitarian situation in Syria. In the current circumstances, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and the relevant parties should step up cooperation with the Syrian Government and prioritize the provision of humanitarian assistance from inside Syria. Cross-border humanitarian operations should strictly follow the United Nations guiding principles of humanitarian assistance and relevant international law and observe the principles of neutrality, impartiality and non-politicization.

With regard to Syrian cross-border humanitarian assistance, China has been actively engaged in the negotiations on resolution 2504 (2020) and draft resolution S/2020/25, making every effort to bridge differences and encourage the parties to show flexibility and work towards a compromise. We commend the co-penholders, the Russian Federation and Secretary-General Guterres for their efforts and welcome Council members finding a compromise on the issue of the extension. Given the current situation, extending the mandate for two crossing points by six months is realistic and feasible. In addition, these two crossing points are the most important ones and serve the humanitarian needs of Syria.

We hope that the relevant parties will continue to have a constructive dialogue on Syrian cross-border humanitarian assistance.

Ms. King (Saint Vincent and the Grenadines): Our decision to vote in favour of resolution 2504 (2020) was driven by a deep sense of urgency to provide much-needed humanitarian support to the Syrian people. There are no perfect solutions regarding this complex matter of competing concerns and interests. That calls for acute judgment in all circumstances. Saint Vincent and the Grenadines therefore embraces that option for the sake of human dignity. Yesterday, we all expressed our commitment to multilateral diplomacy and cooperation (see S/PV.8699). We see that commitment in action today as we have been able to find common ground on this very important issue. We also look forward to the Secretary-General's report by the end of February. We remain in favour of optimal arrangements for access so that we do not leave a single person without access to basic needs.

It would be remiss of me not to commend the efforts of Germany and Belgium, the co-penholders, as well as Kuwait, even though it is no longer a member of the Security Council, in facilitating and encouraging the discussions on this important matter. The negotiation process was indeed complex but we admire their commitment and perseverance.

Mr. Syihab (Indonesia): Indonesia welcomes the adoption of resolution 2504 (2020), which extends the cross-border mechanism. Indeed, it has been a complex and lengthy process. We thank the co-penholders, Belgium, Germany and earlier Kuwait, for facilitating the discussions and for finding a compromise among Council members.

My delegation has previously mentioned that civilian lives are at stake and we are responsible for addressing this urgent issue immediately. We believe that everyone around the table is equally unhappy but, as my delegation has stated on many occasions, it is not about the happiness or unhappiness of us as Council members but about saving human lives. We hope that the adoption of the resolution will help to save millions of Syrian lives.

Again, it is fair to say that we are all equally unhappy but I still think that congratulations are appropriate. Saving 4 million people in the northwest and northeast is not an ideal outcome. As mentioned by the United Nations many times, we believe that the Al-Yarubiyah crossing point is still necessary for the delivery of medical supplies for more than 1.3 million people. We therefore support the request to the Secretary-General

to provide a report on the feasibility of using alternative modalities for the border crossing of Al-Yarubiyah. We have full confidence that the Secretary-General will spare no effort in ensuring the most comprehensive, reliable and credible report in that regard.

Indonesia understands that this mechanism was established during a specific situation and is supposedly a temporary instrument in some areas with limited access. We sincerely hope that the Syrian conflict will end so that the cross-border mechanism will no longer be needed. In the meantime, the adjustment of the mechanism needs to be conducted cautiously. Let us continue to stand together in our common goal to ease the suffering of people in need in Syria.

Mr. Nebenzia (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): The Russian Federation abstained in the voting on resolution 2504 (2020), proposed by the co-penholders, for the sole purpose of not blocking cross-border assistance to the Syrian province of Idlib, which is the only one that still really needs that method of delivering supplies. I would recall that from the very first day of negotiations, we expressed our commitment to that goal and, in that context, we did not oppose maintaining the Turkish crossing points.

It remains unclear to us as to why throughout this entire period several delegations categorically refused to engage in negotiations on our alternative draft resolution (S/2020/25). We have still not heard what the draft resolution did not address in terms of substance. Essentially, we have now adopted the same outline. No matter how often we say that humanitarian assistance should remain outside political battles, we still continue to play political games around humanitarian assistance that are very dangerous and shameless, since the "figures of exchange" are in fact the inhabitants of Idlib. Indeed, it was their very well-being that our colleagues appear to have risked in the pursuit of political goals. It is difficult to understand how all this is in line with concern for the people of Idlib, as so extensively declared at other meetings.

Meanwhile, I propose that we consider what kind of resolution we have just adopted so that no one will have different interpretations. The document extends the mandate for six months only for the crossing points from Turkey to Idlib province. The Jordanian border crossing at Al-Ramtha has not been used since the summer of 2018 and the Iraqi one at Al-Yarubiyah since last year. In north-eastern Syria humanitarian supplies

are being delivered through Government-controlled areas. That is reflected in the report of the Secretary-General S/2019/949. It is true that people prefer to remain silent about that.

I would like to say to my Estonian colleague that it is not Russia's task to find reliable ways to deliver assistance to the Syrian people. That is the task of the United Nations in coordination with the Syrian authorities. It should long have taken care of that issue in the region. In accordance with the guiding principles of humanitarian assistance, the United Nations must, I underline must, do that in coordination with the Syrian authorities at their request and with their consent. It must do that. The resolution clearly stipulates that this is an urgent temporary measure designed to assist those who cannot be reached through existing routes. It also mandates the enhanced monitoring of supply deliveries to those in need. We believe that monitoring cannot be effectively carried out unless United Nations personnel have access to the area of operations. That is not just our whim, but rather a key provision of resolution 2165 (2014) that has never been observed throughout the five years of the mechanism's existence — for some reason, everyone prefers not to talk about that. Specialized reports of the Secretary-General also avoid that issue. That is not right. And, since the resolution calls for another such report to be prepared, we would very much like to see there information about what has been done to ensure direct access for the United Nations to the area of operations, both in public work and in contacts with groups represented in Idlib.

The second important short-term task, in our view, is to mark vehicles that deliver humanitarian assistance. How to do it and what insignia to use is not so important. However, those vehicles should be easy to differentiate from commercial and other traffic. First, this is a basic security requirement during armed conflict. Secondly, this is an issue that has to do with transparency of the operation. And, thirdly, this is an important confidence-building measure; whatever one might say, confidence with the Syrian authorities needs to be restored.

We are convinced that, without creating an atmosphere of acceptance, no international organization will be able to establish stable and effective operations in the country. Again, this is not our whim, but what General Assembly resolutions on humanitarian assistance directly prescribe. Those documents stipulate that the central authorities of the

host country should play the leading role in initiating, providing and coordinating assistance on their territory. We should always bear that in mind when we return to the question of cross-border assistance — a principal issue. We welcome the fact that this resolution includes a reference to the guiding principles of humanitarian assistance set out in Assembly resolution 46/182.

We have once again pointed out some problematic aspects of this mechanism. Alas, no prospects for resolving them are discernible thus far. We hope that this trend will be reversed, otherwise we will face the same set of problems when we address this issue again in the summer. This task can be achieved only once we get back to the basic guiding principles for providing humanitarian assistance, namely, coordination with the Government of the host country.

Ms. Pierce (United Kingdom): The United Kingdom voted to abstain in the voting on resolution 2504 (2020). We will not vote to stop vital aid reaching Syria, but neither will we vote in favour of a resolution that reduces aid provision for vulnerable populations and puts lives at risk. Although four of the five permanent members of the Security Council abstained in the voting, we obviously did not do so for the same reasons. I will come back to that.

Since the Syrian conflict began, in 2011-2012, the United Kingdom has committed over \$3.5 billion to Syria's humanitarian crisis. We have provided over 28 million food rations, over 17 million medical consultations and over 12 million vaccines. They Syrian people have seen many sad days since 2011. But this day is potentially one of the saddest, because it is the first time that a Security Council member has chosen to play politics with humanitarian assistance — and not only play politics with the United Nations and humanitarian assistance. In doing that, Russia is playing dice with the lives of the Syrian people in the north-east. We are gravely disappointed that, due to Russian's decisions to approach the matter in this way, the Security Council has been left with no choice but to adopt a resolution that does not meet the humanitarian needs of the Syrian people.

The humanitarian situation in Syria has not significantly improved and, to our deep regret, neither is there a significant improvement on the horizon. The urgent need for cross-border assistance continues, and not only in Idlib. It is not a political tool to be bargained with. It should be purely based on humanitarian

need. As a number of speakers have said, the United Nations — the body charged by the international community with delivering humanitarian assistance and coordinating humanitarian efforts — asked for four crossings and 12 months. The diplomatic effort that went into negotiating the resolution cannot disguise the fact that it is in truth a woefully inadequate response to the situation on the ground. The exclusion of any border crossing into north-east Syria is, in our view, deeply regrettable. It puts the lives of thousands of civilians in Syria at risk.

More than 1.4 million people relied on medical supplies through the Al-Yarubiyah crossing in the past year. The World Health Organization estimates that health-service availability will be reduced by up to 50 per cent. Trauma care will suffer. Child health care will suffer. Immunization provision will suffer. A World Health Organization shipment through Al-Yarubiyah would provide over 700,000 people with essential medicines and supplies for three months. It is on its way and will arrive in Irbil on Sunday. The Russians like to say, and said to the press today, that humanitarian aid is coming from within Syria — and therefore border crossings are not needed. That is not the assessment of the United Nations. It is not the assessment of respected humanitarian non-governmental organizations like the International Committee of the Red Cross or the Safe the Children Fund. I doubt very much that it is the assessment of the 1.4 million people in the north-east of Syria who have been relying on this aid.

Let me be very clear that the Russian Ambassador set out what he believes the inclusion of the reference to the General Assembly resolution means for the idea that the consent of the Syrian Government is needed for aid to cross over into Syria. It is not needed. The reference to General Assembly resolution 46/182 is in a preambular paragraph. It is not applicable to the cross-border situations of Syria. What is applicable are the humanitarian principles themselves. There are four: humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence. That means the aid has to go to those most in need, and the General Assembly resolution says the United Nations is central to that effort.

We believe that the Council should be prepared to take action, including restoring cross-border access in the north-east, if the Secretary-General's review concludes that alternative humanitarian access routes are inadequate to meet the humanitarian need of the population. The closure of the Al-Yarubiyah crossing

places the responsibility for ensuring that vital aid reaches vulnerable populations in north-east Syria squarely on the Syrian authorities. The Russians said that was something the Syrian authorities could be relied on to do. I beg to differ, given the way Syria treats many of its people. This is worse than putting the fox in charge of a hen coop. The closure of Al-Yarubiyah means that we will need to monitor very closely the response of the Syrian authorities and the Russians, who have people on the ground. We will expect them to provide the necessary authorizations and remove bureaucratic impediments so that aid can be delivered on the basis of the United Nations humanitarian principles.

We will ask the United Nations to report regularly on the humanitarian situation in the north-eastern part of Syria. I call today on both Syria and Russia to give concrete assurances to the Council that any aid distributed by their representatives, or those associated with them, will be done on the basis of those most in need, and need alone, and that organizations registered and operating in Damascus, whether or not affiliated with the United Nations, will also get the permissions and the access that they need to deliver aid to Syrian people on the basis of those most in need, and need alone. That is what humanitarian principles mean — humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence — and that is all they mean.

Mr. Heusgen (Germany): Let me first thank all those around the table, who have worked very hard to achieve tonight's result, in particular our colleagues and friends from Kuwait and Belgium, who have worked very hard for two years to keep the humanitarian mechanism alive.

As we sit here, it is night in Idlib. The people there went to bed last night not knowing if they would wake up and continue to receive humanitarian aid. The good news tonight is that they will wake up tomorrow, they will continue to get humanitarian aid and, despite the suffering that they have endured from displacement and the bombings of hospitals and schools, at least the flow of humanitarian aid will continue. The cross-border operations are essential to the provision of aid. We have done everything we can to keep them alive so that those 2.7 million people will continue to receive humanitarian aid.

That decision comes, however, at a very heavy price. Tomorrow morning, 1.4 million people in the north-eastern part of Syria will wake up not knowing if

they will be able to continue to get the medical aid that they desperately need. Contrary to what our Russian colleague said, it is not possible for the entire population there to get everything from different sources. As our British and French colleagues said earlier, eight to 10 trucks are waiting just outside Al-Yarubiyah to deliver that aid to the population in need — medical aid that maintains the lives of people. I would appeal to the Russian Ambassador and Russia to do everything to see to it that those eight to 10 trucks get through to the people who are in need of that aid.

We voted against the oral amendment proposed by the Russian Federation with regard to General Assembly resolution 46/182, for the specific reason that Al-Yarubiyah is not under the control of the Syrian Government and they cannot exercise authority there, and we therefore need the Russians' support. I once again appeal to the Russian representative to do everything so that those people who are now asking if they will be able to get their dialysis treatment and all other medical treatment will be able to get it in future.

Mrs. Craft (United States of America): The United States abstained in this evening's voting for one reason and one reason only. After months of negotiations, the text of resolution 2504 (2020) was the only path forward that would reasonably allow for the delivery of any aid at all to the Syrian people. We could not veto such a measure, as we are committed to supporting innocent Syrians to the greatest extent possible. In abstaining, we are lending a voice to the 4 million Syrians whose welfare has been overlooked for far too long, but I want to be inescapably clear about what just happened.

What we have seen today from the Russian Federation is shocking — a comprehensive indifference to human suffering. We are left with a watered-down resolution, wholly inadequate to the needs of the Syrian people, because of the unwillingness of our Russian colleagues to maintain current levels of aid flows. Resolution 2504 (2020) needlessly places the immediate futures of more than 1 million Syrians in jeopardy.

It would be easy to say that we were forced into an impossible choice today — a choice between vetoing this measure in a principled stand for aid to all who need it and sacrificing the principle to secure a small measure of aid for millions of Syrians entering the heart of winter. But that would let Russia off the hook far too easily, for it suggests that the Council really had no other options.

In truth, we do not find ourselves in this situation because the conditions on the ground no longer allow for aid delivery; as we have heard over and over again from United Nations officials, the existing cross-border aid mechanism is working. Neither are we here because of a lack of willingness among the other Council members to find a way forward; my 10 elected colleagues went to great lengths to find a solution that could provide more food and medicine to people. We find ourselves in this situation because the Russian Federation has decided to use deprivation as a weapon against the Syrian people. This is a crisis of Russia's making. It is theirs to own.

Although we are profoundly disappointed by the intransigence of our Russian colleagues, the United States is not willing to play politics with the lives of innocent Syrians. It is the unambiguous conclusion of United Nations officials that the humanitarian situation in Syria is steadily worsening. That is why the United States sought to renew all four of the crossings currently authorized by resolution 2449 (2018) and to add a fifth crossing, at Tall Abyad in north-eastern Syria. That is why we did not obstruct a measure to provide at least some aid to the Syrian people.

The record should reflect that any attempts to characterize the humanitarian situation as improving are gross distortions of the truth. I wish to make it clear that consent by the Syrian authorities is not required in order for humanitarian assistance to be provided through the border crossings, as in all other prior humanitarian resolutions on Syria adopted by the Security Council.

Although we are proud of our principled stand to help every Syrian, we are bitterly disappointed by the Council's inability to deliver what the Syrian people so plainly need. It is never right to leave even a single life hanging in the balance, but today we have handed down this fate to 1 million people. Today's action is a body blow not only to the Council's credibility but also to its moral authority. Let us remember that the United Nations asked for — and the United States strongly supported — a 12-month extension. Tragically, in six months we will be here again as a consequence of today's action. Will Russia try one more time to hold the Council hostage? Will we be faced once again with Russian attempts to further erode principled humanitarian action?

Moving forward, the United States will do everything in its power to recover the Council's moral

authority. We will not fail to remind this body of its obligation to maintain peace and security. We will not tire in our defence of humanitarian principles. And we will not cease in our work to provide every last Syrian woman, man and child with the resources that they need to survive.

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

First of all, Viet Nam commends the efforts of the co-penholders, as well as the efforts and constructive engagement of other important partners, including other members of the Security Council. Viet Nam voted in favour of resolution 2504 (2020), bearing in mind that the cross-border humanitarian aid mechanism remains an essential part of the overall humanitarian response in Syria.

In that regard, we would like to express our appreciation to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs for its tireless efforts, and we support its continued operation in accordance with the mandate provided by the relevant Security Council resolutions. We believe that the Office will continue its work in an effective and accountable way.

Viet Nam shares the concerns of other members about the ongoing complicated humanitarian situation in Syria. Viet Nam is of the position that the Syrian Government bears the primary responsibility of settling that situation, with the assistance of the international community. It is also necessary to ensure that international humanitarian aid be delivered in a timely and adequate manner to the hundreds of thousands of people in urgent need, and not be diverted or subjected to manipulation.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

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

Mr. Ja'afari (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): It is regrettable to see such inhumanity at the outset of this meeting when the Security Council voted against the will of the General Assembly, as if we, in this international Organization, abide by two charters rather than one: a charter that some members of the Security Council implement and another, comprehensive, Charter according to which members of the General Assembly act.

It is also regrettable that the commitment made by the General Assembly in resolution 46/182, which established the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), has not been respected. Moreover, the remarks made by the Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation at the beginning of this meeting have been subjected to a political agenda that has forcibly dominated the humanitarian agenda since the adoption of resolution 2165 (2014).

I would like to lay bare to the Council the reasons for my position. Since the outbreak of the terrorist war against my country, the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic has undertaken relentless efforts to ensure the delivery of humanitarian assistance and services, as well as support to all its citizens, without discrimination, throughout the country. Those efforts have enabled millions of Syrians to continue receiving their monthly entitlements, social support, food aid, health care and free education, as well as salaries, despite the blockade and coercive unilateral measures imposed against the Syrian people.

The Government of my country, along with its key humanitarian partners, such as the Syrian Arab Red Crescent and duly authorized non-governmental organizations (NGOs), has engaged in sincere cooperation with relevant United Nations agencies and other humanitarian actors, such as the International Committee of the Red Cross and 27 NGOs that have been authorized to operate in Syria. The Syrian Government has rendered all facilities and support to all those organizations, while fully upholding the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of the Syrian Arab Republic, as well as the guiding principles of coordinating and strengthening humanitarian action, as set forth in General Assembly resolution 46/182.

In the face of the efforts of the Syrian Government, buttressed by its allies who believe in international law and the provisions of the Charter, the representatives of Western countries in the Council, including humanitarian penholders, have persistently violated the provisions of the Charter by using the forum of the Security Council to defame the Syrian Government and prolong the crisis by hindering its settlement.

What is astonishing is that OCHA has become totally partial and taken the side of Western States, in showing hostility towards the Syrian State, by perpetuating a hostile approach against the Syrian

Government and overlooking the significant efforts made by the Syrian Government and its institutions at the humanitarian level, as well as the crucial role of the Syrian Government in facilitating United Nations work and other humanitarian partners. Most important, OCHA has included myriad fabrications, misleading assessments and inflammatory rhetoric in its various reports, which is both unprofessional and unethical and runs counter to the spirit of partnership and cooperation that the Syrian Government adheres to in dealing with relevant United Nations agencies and humanitarian partners.

In the Council's meetings held on 19 and 20 December 2019 (see S/PV.8694 and S/PV.8696), my delegation clearly expressed its legal, humanitarian and ethical concerns and motivations behind our position in rejecting the renewal of the provisions on the cross-border humanitarian aid mechanism, as established in resolution 2165 (2014), which was adopted under artificial circumstances — circumstances that do not exist today, as I will detail in the following reasons.

First, there is no legal or ethical status of the so-called penholders, and the Western States supporting them, because any claim that they care for the Syrian people is a mere lie. Such claims stand in contradiction to the practices carried out by their Governments that invest in terrorism, perpetuating occupation, waging wars and aggression and imposing unilateral coercive measures against my country, as well as pillaging our natural wealth.

Second, the penholders and their supporters have unceasingly ignored that the heart of humanitarian action in Syria is, and should always be, exclusively in the capital, Damascus, rather than some other capital or city in neighbouring countries and beyond, in line with the inviolable sovereignty of the Syrian Arab Republic, as underscored by the relevant Security Council resolutions.

The penholders' violation was clearly demonstrated today in the statement delivered by the Permanent Representative of Belgium, who noted in his opening remarks that the delegations of Belgium and Germany had consulted with members of the Council and countries neighbouring Syria — that is what he said. However, he forgot the imperative of consulting the Syrian Government, pursuant to General Assembly resolution 46/182. The Belgian Ambassador then called for a vote on the oral amendment introduced by the

Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation. That oral amendment demonstrates the importance of upholding resolution 46/182.

The Ambassadors of Estonia, the United Kingdom and the United States of America regrettably repeated the same unilateral interpretation of the provision of the new resolution (resolution 2504 (2020)) in their statements. They said — and those present heard them — that cross-border humanitarian access does not require consultation with the Syrian Government. That of course contravenes the logical and legal interpretation that was, for example, presented by the Ambassadors of China and the Russian Federation, among others.

Third, the penholders and their supporters did not honour the commitment that they made in resolution 46/182, which, as I mentioned, governs humanitarian action and underscores the need for respecting the national sovereignty of the State concerned and for cooperation with it to provide assistance for those in need, not providing it only with notices with minimum standards of transparency, professionalism and credibility.

Fourth, the penholders and their supporters have ignored developments on the ground since the adoption of resolution 2165 (2014), on 14 July 2014. Such developments include, inter alia, the recovery by the Syrian Government and its allies of all the areas previously classified by the United Nations as besieged or hard-to-reach. Today there are no besieged, restricted or hard-to-reach areas. They no longer exist.

Fifth, facts are uncovered about the unlimited support for terrorism provided by Governments that are known, after long denying practices, such as the use of the Al-Yarubiyah border crossing, not controlled by the Syrian Government, to ensure the continuous delivery of money and weapons, including chemical weapons to terrorist organizations, and the smuggling of our oil, artefacts and property.

Sixth, OCHA staff and the United Nations Monitoring Mechanism have been unable to ensure the continuous delivery of humanitarian aid to Syrian civilians in need. They have also been unable to ensure that assistance does not fall into the hands of terrorist organizations, which have pillaged and used such assistance for years to strengthen their control, fund their terrorist acts and recruit new terrorists. That applies to the city of Idlib and its environs, which are controlled, as the Council knows, by the terrorist

Jabhat Al-Nusra group, whose lifeline and survival are dependent on the support of the rogue Turkish regime, through operations in the town of Gaziantep, which was chosen by the United Nations to set up an operating room.

They control our border crossings with Turkey, through which money, weapons and assistance flow. Who knows? Terrorists who are transferred publicly by the Turkish regime from north-western Syria in Idlib to Libya may get their share from such United Nations assistance. That means that OCHA is also providing food and humanitarian assistance to terrorists in Idlib who are bound for Tripoli through Turkey. That is the humanitarian action envisaged by some members. Of course, OCHA and the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs will always commend the violations of international law committed by the Turkish regime and its support for terrorism. They will then call on countries to reward that regime. That is hypocrisy.

Seventh, OCHA and the Monitoring Mechanism have been unable to provide enough clarification on the nature of so-called partners and third-party independent companies, despite our repeated requests to provide such clarifications in that respect. It is high time for some to abandon their approach of remote diplomacy and politics as though it were a PlayStation game. They should engage professionally and objectively, particularly the penholders, in supporting the efforts and institutions of the Syrian Government and stop levelling accusations, conducting smear campaigns and fostering hostility.

In conclusion, my delegation reiterates that the priority is to improve the humanitarian situation in Syria, which can be achieved only by supporting the

efforts of the Syrian Government and its allies, end the unilateral coercive measures imposed on the Syrian people and cease attempts to undermine reconstruction and recovery, while providing an environment conducive to the return of migrants.

The President: As members of the Council have before them the draft resolution contained in document S/2020/25, submitted by the Russian Federation, how would the Russian Federation wish to proceed?

Mr. Nebenzia (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): In the light of the recent adoption of resolution 2504 (2020), the Russian Federation would like to withdraw the draft resolution contained in document S/2020/25.

Ms. Pierce (United Kingdom): I know time marches on; I will be brief. I have a practice in the Security Council of defending the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) here at the United Nations whenever the Syrian representative attacks it. I wish to point out that, on this occasion, the same will apply.

OCHA and the United Nations do a fantastic job in the most difficult of circumstances on the ground. I heard what the Syrian representative said about how much aid the Syrian authorities deliver to their own people, and we will be pursuing that in future meetings. I will take it as a commitment from the Syrian authorities to allowing non-governmental organizations access into Syria and permitting them to distribute humanitarian assistance to the people most in need. We will be holding him to account with regard to his remarks.

The meeting rose at 7.05 p.m.