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Provisional

President: Mr. França Danese/Mr. Moretti (Brazil)

Members:

Albania	Ms. Dautllari
China	Mr. Geng Shuang
Ecuador	Mr. Pérez Loose
France	Mrs. Broadhurst Estival
Gabon	Ms. Koumby Missambo
Ghana	Mr. Agyeman
Japan	Mrs. Shino
Malta	Ms. Gatt
Mozambique	Mr. Kumanga
Russian Federation	Mr. Nebenzia
Switzerland	Mrs. Baeriswyl
United Arab Emirates	Mr. Abushahab
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland . .	Dame Barbara Woodward
United States of America	Mrs. Thomas-Greenfield

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East

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The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East

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

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the following briefers to participate in the meeting: Mr. Geir Pedersen, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria; and Ms. Edem Wosornu, Director of Operations and Advocacy at the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.

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

I give the floor to Mr. Pedersen.

Mr. Pedersen: Since March 2020, the Syrian conflict has been in a kind of strategic stalemate, characterized by static front lines, persistent violence and sporadic escalations, with de facto authorities entrenching their control and five foreign armies present and active. However, I have long warned that this status quo leaves Syria at the risk of drifting into deeper and prolonged fragmentation, and that it involves escalation risks of the most frightening kind. My warnings have grown louder this year as we have seen growing instability and violence, exacerbated by the lack of a meaningful political process. Today I am sounding the alarm that the situation is now at its most dangerous for a long time.

I say that because, on top of the violence emanating from the Syrian conflict itself, the Syrian people now face a terrifying prospect of a potential wider escalation, given the alarming developments in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory and the region. Spillover into Syria is not just a risk; it has already begun.

Air strikes attributed to Israel hit Aleppo and Damascus airports several times during the reporting period, temporarily halting the United Nations Humanitarian Air Service, which operates from those airports and services Syria's humanitarian programmes.

In addition, Israel says it has responded with artillery, mortar and air strikes towards what it said were a number of launches from Syria towards Israel on the occupied Syrian Golan, with further exchanges again this morning. The Syrian Government says that some of its soldiers were killed or injured in the strikes, as were civilian workers in the strikes on the airports. Meanwhile, the United States says that its forces have faced multiple attacks by groups that it claims are backed by Iran, including on Syrian territory. Last week, the United States carried out strikes on facilities in Syria that it claims are used by Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps and groups that it backs. Further exchanges were reported again this morning.

With the wider region at its most dangerous and tense in a very long time, fuel is being added to a tinderbox that was already beginning to ignite. Even before the regional developments, Syria was seeing the worst surge in violence in more than three years. I deeply deplore the fact that the violence has already left civilians dead, maimed and displaced in higher numbers than at any point since 2020.

There has been a significant intensification of attacks on Government-controlled areas. That includes a deadly attack on the graduation ceremony of a military academy in Homs, which remains unclaimed but that the Government has attributed to terrorist organizations, as well as further attacks in subsequent days. It also includes reports of rocket attacks throughout October from Security Council-listed Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham. Hundreds were reportedly injured, and many dozens killed, among them civilians, including women and children.

Pro-Government bombardment in the north-west has escalated to levels echoing those at the height of the conflict before 2020. It has caused the displacement of more than 120,000 civilians at its height and significant damage to critical services and infrastructure, including health facilities, schools and camps. Hundreds of civilians have reportedly been injured, with dozens killed, among them women and children, as well as aid workers.

Following a terrorist attack on Turkish Government facilities in Ankara, the north-east has seen one of the largest escalations in years, with reports of Turkish strikes, the destruction of civilian infrastructure and reports of casualties, including civilians. The Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) claimed that they

subsequently killed Turkish soldiers inside Syrian territory, with reports of SDF strikes on civilian areas too. Meanwhile, the Security Council-listed terrorist group Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant remains active and continues its attacks on forces, particularly in Deir ez-Zor, Raqqa and the central desert region in Homs governorate.

That is what the Syrian civilian population has endured in the past month alone. Let me remind members that all of the other sources of pain and instability on which I have consistently briefed remain unchanged and as acute as ever. The Syrian economy remains in a dire and worsening state. Critical infrastructure remains degraded and destroyed. The humanitarian situation is alarming, as members will hear from the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs shortly. Reports continue of arbitrary arrests, of torture and deaths in custody. There is no meaningful movement on the file of detained, disappeared and missing persons. Refugees do not see conditions for their safe, dignified and voluntary return emerging — in fact, they are witnessing quite the opposite, with the re-emergence of extensive hostilities. I should mention that a recent Syrian Government statement on refugees contained elements that need further exploration. Popular frustration clearly remains heightened, with protests in As-Suwayda ongoing now for more than two months.

Syria, the Syrian people and the wider region are in no position to endure new explosions of violent conflict in Syria, whether caused by internal or external dynamics. We are now seeing the hard reality that, without real engagement or progress towards a political solution of the Syrian conflict, any stability is only wafer-thin — when it breaks apart, it can unleash mass forces of violence and instability. There is a real and growing danger of that in Syria. The only antidote would be an immediate de-escalation to stem the tide of violence and to refocus on a credible political process that charts a path forward within a framework that fully respects and restores Syria's sovereignty, unity, independence and territorial integrity, enabling the Syrian people to realize their legitimate aspirations in line with resolution 2254 (2015).

I fear complacency has set in about the lack of such a process today. Regrettably, months of intensive efforts have still not yielded consensus on the venue for resuming the Constitutional Committee, or on its substance. Nonetheless, my consultations continue. Proposals to advance step-by-step confidence-building

measures are on the table. The recent regional developments have temporarily slowed down consultations on those matters, but we need to come back to them without delay.

Indeed, I continue to work with the same commitment as always to advance those and all other aspects of the political process to implement resolution 2254 (2015). I have been engaging, and will continue to engage, with the Syrian Government and the Syrian Negotiations Commission. I also continue to engage a wide range of Syrians, including through the Civil Society Support Room and the Women's Advisory Board, with whom I met last week and who once again demonstrated the importance of women's full and effective participation in the political process.

However, today, right now, I have four immediate messages for the Council.

First, we need urgent de-escalation within Syria. We urgently need to work to reinstate calm towards a nationwide ceasefire, alongside a cooperative approach to countering Security Council-listed terrorist groups in line with international law.

Secondly, we need all actors — Syrian and non-Syrian — to exercise maximum restraint. It is particularly indefensible that Syria seems to be treated as a free-for-all space in which different actors can settle their scores with one another with impunity. Decisions that are out of Syrian hands cannot be allowed to drag Syria into another war.

Thirdly, we need all actors to operate in full compliance with international humanitarian law, including the protection of civilians and civilian infrastructure and by strictly upholding the principles of distinction and proportionality.

Fourthly, we need all key international actors to keep channels open and cooperate, despite the rising tensions on multiple fronts. I will make every effort to contribute to promoting that. I will continue to prioritize contacts with Astana, Arab and Western players, both individually and collectively, and I will work to foster joint efforts towards de-escalation and advancing the political process.

That is the only way to de-escalate the current violence and protect the possibility of a political process to implement resolution 2254 (2015). Complacency cannot be the answer. If it is, then I fear the already fraying status quo may fully collapse, bringing untold

misery to Syrian civilians and radiating further instability across the region, which is already at breaking point. We must de-escalate, and do so now for the sake of Syria.

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

I now give the floor to Ms. Wosornu.

Ms. Wosornu: In recent weeks, the world's attention has been fixed on the crisis in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory, and rightly so. But at the same time, we must not turn away from humanitarian crises that persist elsewhere, on a vast scale, including in the same region. I join the Security Council today from Cairo, having spent the past week visiting a number of countries in the region, including Syria. I therefore appreciate this opportunity to update members on the humanitarian situation in Syria, where the humanitarian emergency has continued to deepen in the weeks since our previous meeting on this topic (see S/PV.9426).

This month, as we just heard from the Special Envoy, several areas across northern Syria experienced a serious escalation in hostilities. In north-west Syria, we have seen the most significant escalation in violence since 2019. According to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, at least 70 civilians had been killed as of 20 October, including 36 women and 14 children. The civilian fatalities have occurred both in Government areas — notably, as Mr. Pedersen mentioned, in the drone attack on the Homs military academy graduation ceremony on 5 October — and in non-Government areas. Many more have been injured. In the span of two weeks, from 5 to 18 October, more than 120,000 people were displaced in Idlib and western Aleppo. The hostilities have also damaged critical services and infrastructure, including more than 40 health facilities, two dozen schools and more than 20 water systems, in addition to temporarily affecting the main power station in Idlib.

Attacks, including air strikes and artillery shelling, have continued on a near-daily basis, with reports of more people being killed and injured in the past week including, alarmingly, a growing number of children. One of those children was Sami, a 15-year-old boy who had been displaced to Idlib four years ago, and whose father, Nabil, works as a driver for a national non-governmental organization that partners with the United Nations. Sami and his childhood friend Ali were killed by shelling in Idlib on 26 October. His mother told staff from the Office for the Coordination of

Humanitarian Affairs that the boys had gathered that day to play football. She said that people are afraid all the time because of the increasing fighting and that they try to stay inside. She said that they need to be protected from hostilities and that they want to live in peace and security.

While about half of those displaced by the violence have reportedly returned to their homes, many tens of thousands remain fearful of returning, further adding to the cohort of 2.9 million people already displaced in the north-west. And reports have continued to emerge of additional displacements in recent days. Women and girls, who make up 80 per cent of those in displacement camps and informal sites, continue to bear the most severe consequences. As has been reported, they face pervasive threats of gender-based violence and barriers to accessing services and assistance. Hostilities have impeded life-saving sexual and reproductive health-care and gender-based violence services.

Let me turn to the north-east, where, as has already been mentioned, a spike in hostilities earlier this month damaged a range of critical civilian infrastructure, including power stations and water facilities, in Al-Hasakah, Qamishli, Tel Tamer and other areas. Disruptions to electricity have impacted water and health facilities and increased the demand for fuel for generators and heating as the winter months approach. That has further inflated the already-high prices of fuel, transportation, food and other commodities. While many services have been restored, those disruptions to already-precarious electricity, water and fuel supplies continue to make life extremely challenging for a vulnerable population and place a heightened demand on overstretched humanitarian services.

I once again echo the Secretary-General in urging all parties across Syria to respect their obligations under international law. The parties must take constant care to spare civilians and civilian objects, including essential infrastructure, in accordance with international humanitarian law. The Special Envoy spoke to those issues as well. The escalation in hostilities has also had a deep impact on humanitarian workers and operations, particularly in the north-west of the country. Three aid workers were among those killed, and many organizations were forced to temporarily suspend operations. Some activities, including nutrition services and the provision of safe spaces for women and girls, remain suspended.

Nevertheless, the United Nations and its humanitarian partners have continued their efforts to get critical assistance to those affected by the conflict. That includes the provision of clean water, waste management, food, tents, protection services and emergency medical supplies, including supplies for sexual and reproductive health services for displaced women, services for displaced persons in general and the provision of vital support to health facilities. In particular, the ability to deliver assistance at scale across the border from Türkiye has been indispensable in meeting the vast and increasing humanitarian needs. In the past six weeks, 251 trucks have brought in critical supplies through the Bab Al-Hawa or Bab Al-Salam crossings. We have asked the Government of Syria to extend its permission for the use of the Bab Al-Salam and Al-Rai crossings beyond 13 November, for as long as the humanitarian needs continue, to ensure that we can provide essential humanitarian assistance in a predictable and sustainable way. As part of our commitment to providing assistance by whatever means possible to those who need it, we continue efforts to facilitate the cross-line delivery of supplies to key areas in the north-west and throughout the country — and we shall continue to do so.

As if the escalation in hostilities were not enough, the continued economic crisis, including the steep decline in the value of the Syrian pound and high inflation rates, is contributing to raising the prices of food and other items to further record highs. The combined impact of all those factors is not only piling immense pressure on an already-vulnerable population — as I heard when I was in Syria — it is also increasing the reliance on humanitarian assistance for basic survival. I ask members to consider, for example, Um Ahmad, a single mother in Hama, who was forced to make the difficult choice to pull her son out of school so that he could help support the family. Stories like hers are becoming increasingly common. It is therefore with deep concern that I report that we have seen little improvement over the past month in the serious funding shortfalls affecting our operations. Ten months into the year, the Syrian humanitarian response plan has received \$1.6 billion of the \$5.4 billion requested. We are deeply appreciative of the donors for their support, and we continue count on them for more funding.

As we have repeatedly warned, this is translating into significant constraints on our ability to provide critical assistance throughout the country, resulting in

reductions in food distributions, closures of safe spaces for women and girls and the scaling back of health services in medical facilities, among other things. It is even more concerning as we approach the winter season, with an estimated 5.7 million people across the country in need of humanitarian support for critical shelter and household items. Those are life-saving items in the cold months.

We are doing what we can to prioritize assistance within the resources available. The Syria Humanitarian Fund and the Syria Cross-border Humanitarian Fund are allocating nearly \$50 million to mitigate the impact of the harsh winter conditions in vulnerable communities, including through the provision of tents and shelter, household items, water and sanitation support, cash-based assistance and efforts to boost early recovery and resilience. However, without additional funding and resources, many people will go without the support they need to get through the harsh winter months.

This is a deeply concerning time for the region, and indeed for the world, and there is no shortage of crises crying out for our attention. However, with more than 15 million people in need of critical humanitarian and protection support in ever more challenging conditions, the situation in Syria is one that unquestionably demands our continued focus and attention.

The President: I thank Ms. Wosornu for her briefing.

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

Mrs. Thomas-Greenfield (United States of America): I thank Special Envoy Pedersen and Ms. Wosornu for their continued attention to the ongoing conflict and dire humanitarian needs in Syria.

Before Hamas's horrific terrorist attacks against Israel on 7 October, the Special Envoy warned the Security Council that increased military activity in Syria had the potential to spill over into neighbouring countries. Unfortunately, the Special Envoy's words proved prescient. Terrorist groups, some backed by the Syrian regime and Iran, are threatening to expand the conflict beyond Gaza by using Syrian territory to plot and launch attacks against Israel. We have also seen attacks on United States forces in Syria, whose mission has been — and continues to be — to defeat Da'esh.

The Syrian regime has allowed Iran and terrorist groups, including Hizbullah, to use its international

airports for military purposes. By doing so, the Al-Assad regime has put civilian travellers at those airports at risk. The regime should stop playing the victim card. It is fully within the regime's power to prevent Iran from using Syrian civilian airports to transport weapons and fighters that are then used to threaten neighbouring States. We call on the regime to curb the activities of Iran-backed militias in Syria, stop the flow of foreign arms and fighters through its territory and cease escalatory actions in the Golan Heights.

The United States has warned all actors not to take advantage of the situation in Gaza to widen or deepen the conflict. Moreover, we have made clear that we will respond to attacks on our own personnel and facilities in Syria or against United States interests and, where appropriate, exercise our right to self-defence forcefully, proportionately and in a manner that minimizes civilian harm.

The narrowly tailored United States strikes on Iranian militia sites in eastern Syria conducted on 27 October were in response to the repeated attacks made on United States forces in Syria and Iraq since 17 October and were an appropriate exercise of our right to self-defence under Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations. No one can argue that United States strikes were — or will be — without warning, and as United States Secretary of Defence Austin stated after the recent strikes, the United States will not hesitate to take further necessary measures to protect our people.

At this perilous moment for the region, the protection of civilians must be at the forefront. We are outraged by the relentless attacks carried out by the Al-Assad regime and by the Russian attacks in northern Syria, which killed scores of civilians, displaced more than 100,000 people and destroyed vital infrastructure. In just the last week, the regime or its Russian allies struck a displacement camp in north-west Syria, killing innocent children, and we continue to see attacks on schools and medical facilities. Neither the Al-Assad regime nor Russia has even tried to offer a plausible explanation for those horrors. For years now, their strategy has been to deny, deflect and disinform — to claim that anyone who opposes them is a terrorist, that any target they choose is legitimate and that any report of civilian harm is fabricated. That is not how responsible nations behave. It is not the standard to which the United States holds itself, or to which we hold our partners and allies. The Al-Assad regime and Russia will no doubt take the floor to decry our support

for Israel. The difference is that democracies conduct military operations in self-defence and in a way that is intended to minimize civilian harm. They do not intentionally target civilians.

On the political front, we are closely monitoring the sustained protests over the past two months, many of them led by women, in southern Syria, including in Al-Suwayda and Dara'a. We fully support Syrians' freedom of expression and peaceful assembly, including when exercised in protest in pursuit of dignity, freedom, security and justice. Those protests also underscore the need for a Syrian-focused and Syrian-led solution to the conflict.

We commend Special Envoy Pedersen's continued focus on the political track, in line with resolution 2254 (2015), despite the Al-Assad regime's obstructionism. Resolution 2254 (2015) remains the only viable road map for a lasting solution to the conflict. In addition, we must work to identify all avenues for advancing the stalled political process, including by supporting the important work of the Women's Advisory Board.

While we work towards a sustainable political solution, we must also continue to address the dire humanitarian situation. The United States welcomes the continued flow of United Nations convoys across the Türkiye-Syria border, which provides life-saving aid to millions in need, as we heard from Ms. Wosornu. However, we are mindful that the United Nations arrangement with the regime regarding the Bab Al-Salam and Bab Al-Rai crossings could lapse as soon as 13 November. There is no reason that the arrangement should not be renewed, and we urge the Al-Assad regime to do so. We must all urge the regime to do so.

The Council must give the United Nations the support it needs to maintain unhindered access to all Syrians, through all modalities, for as long as needed, and the Council — and all Member States — must continue to stand with the Syrian people in their time of need.

Mr. Nebenzia (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We would like to thank Special Envoy Geir Pedersen and Ms. Wosornu for presenting their overview of the political and humanitarian situation in the Syrian Arab Republic.

The situation in Syria remains extremely tense, including because of the unprecedented escalation of

the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. The current increase in tensions on the Syrian-Israeli border is a matter of active external interference, along with the illegal foreign military presence in the north and north-east of the Syrian Arab Republic. This month, the Israeli air forces repeatedly carried out air strikes in Syria, once again targeting important civilian facilities such as the Damascus and Aleppo airports. That put the lives of entirely innocent people and the safety of international air traffic at real risk, not to mention the consequences for the work of the United Nations aviation services, which also deal with humanitarian transportation.

Moreover, on 26 October, United States forces struck two sites near the town of Albu Kamal in eastern Syria on President Biden's orders. Washington declared that the attack was carried out within the framework of the United States' so-called right to self-defence — American-style, thousands of kilometres from United States territory. Such illegitimate actions by Washington are nothing but a gross violation of Syria's sovereignty and the norms of international law. In the context of the serious exacerbation of the situation in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, such forceful actions are fraught with extremely dangerous consequences, since they could provoke an armed escalation throughout the region. That cannot be allowed to happen. However, as usual, the American representative devoted much of her statement to making accusations about Syria and Russia. I would like to emphasize that unlike the United States, we are targeting Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham, which the Security Council has designated a terrorist organization.

We have seen clear evidence of Washington's meddling in Syrian internal affairs in the renewed Arab-Kurdish clashes in the area east of the Euphrates, which have led to more than 100 deaths, and in protests in As-Suwayda governorate, where economic demands have become frankly political. Against that backdrop, the United States and its Western allies, which are occupying significant territory in north-eastern and southern Syria and are involved in smuggling Syrian oil and grain, are exacerbating political tensions on economic pretexts by supplying the Kurds with weapons, which are then used against the native Arab tribes living beyond the Euphrates, including to create threats on the Syrian-Turkish border. They are getting help with that from the Israeli air force, which has expanded the geography of its arbitrary strikes across Deir ez-Zor governorate.

Against that background, one positive element is Damascus's development of its multifaceted interaction with Arab countries, including through economic cooperation and political normalization. Building ties with other extra-regional players is also very important to ensuring that Syria can emerge from the isolation artificially imposed on it. On the political track, we continue to see no alternative to advancing a political process in the Syrian Arab Republic that is Syrian-led and Syrian-owned, with the assistance of the United Nations, in strict compliance with resolution 2254 (2015) and with respect for the country's sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity. In that regard, we believe firmly in the importance of continuing the direct intra-Syrian dialogue for which the Constitutional Committee remains the main platform. The process should not be interfered with by any other initiatives that are not supported by all the stakeholders. We continue to believe that the Syrians themselves should make the principal decisions on the venue for the next rounds of the Constitutional Committee consultations, without external interference. Attempts to present any possible alternative platforms have no foundation.

No efforts are being made to resolve the situation with the remaining terrorist enclave in Idlib. Since the cross-border mechanism was dismantled, the Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham terrorists have effectively blocked humanitarian access to the de-escalation zone and are openly exploiting the needs of the civilian population. Despite the Syrian Government's voluntary sovereign authorizations granted for the use of the Bab Al-Hawa border crossing for humanitarian deliveries, the first convoy was not able to pass through until 19 September, when a total of only 159 trucks entered. That was on the basis of a separate agreement between the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and some humanitarian aid office in Idlib, which agreed to receive aid independently of Damascus and is under the control of the militants I mentioned. There is still no cross-line access, which we consider unacceptable. We believe that following the non-renewal of resolution 2672 (2023), international humanitarian assistance can be carried out in strict compliance with the guiding humanitarian principles of General Assembly resolution 46/182 (1991) — that is, only with the consent of Damascus and in close coordination with it.

Mr. Agyeman (Ghana): I have the honour to deliver this joint statement on behalf of the three African members of the Security Council (A3).

We thank Special Envoy Geir Pedersen and Ms. Edem Wosornu, the Director of Operations and Advocacy at the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, for their briefings, and we welcome the participation of the representatives of the Syrian Arab Republic, the Islamic Republic of Iran and Türkiye in this meeting.

The A3 is alarmed by the resumption of armed violence in Syria. The recent armed clashes along the front lines highlight the precarious nature of the security situation in Syria and the continuing inability of the international community to assist the Syrian people in finding a lasting solution to the country's crisis. In particular, we condemn in the strongest terms the attack of 5 October on a military academy graduation ceremony in Homs that claimed more than 100 lives, including civilians. We are also deeply concerned about the fact that retaliatory attacks have turned northern Syria into a hotbed of armed hostilities with an increasing number of civilian casualties. Regrettably, critical civilian infrastructure, including schools and health, water and power facilities, has been targeted, depriving civilians of access to essential services. We condemn the targeting of defenceless civilians and civilian infrastructure and remind the parties of their obligations under international humanitarian law and the relevant Security Council resolutions.

As we might expect, serious protection concerns have arisen in the context of the escalating violence. At least 61 civilians have been killed and some 123,000 people displaced from 91 communities in the north-west. Women and children continue to pay the highest price. The parties to the conflict must refrain from any action that infringes on the civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights of women and girls. Their fundamental human rights, including their right to work and education, must be preserved at all times.

It bears reminding the parties that there can be no winners amid such relentless violence. Instead, the suffering of the people of Syria continues to increase with each bombing and violent clash, and as the war drags on, Syria continues to lose its rightful place among the comity of nations. For that reason, we call for an immediate nationwide ceasefire, with a view to creating an environment conducive to restarting

the political process. The most workable solution to the conflict remains a Syrian-led and Syrian-owned inclusive political process, undertaken with the support of the international community, under the facilitative role of the United Nations, as detailed in resolution 2254 (2015).

In pursuit of that goal, it will be crucial for the parties to maintain strong cooperation with the Special Envoy Pedersen and support his efforts, including his step-for-step process, to find a lasting political solution to the conflict. Breaking the current deadlock in the small body of the Constitutional Committee meeting will be a significant step in that direction.

Amid this escalating violence, it is deeply concerning that Syria continues to come under repeated attacks from various foreign forces, sometimes targeting civilian infrastructure and disrupting humanitarian aid distribution in the country in contravention of international humanitarian law. We renew our call for respect of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Syria and for the full withdrawal of all foreign forces from the country. Another issue of major concern is the recent mutual shelling between militants in Syria and the Israel Defense Forces over the Golan Heights. Giving the current dynamics in the Middle East region, such attacks, if not checked, raise the prospects of a dangerous escalation of the volatile security situation in the region, with grave consequences for global peace and security.

On the humanitarian front, the A3 is deeply concerned that the current rate of violent hostilities could exacerbate the suffering of the Syrian people. As outlined in today's briefing, thousands of civilians in the north-west are displaced because of the renewed fighting, with women and girls particularly vulnerable as they are further exposed to gender-based violence in displacement camps. In fact, gender-based violence, forced and early marriage, and denial of resources and opportunities have become part of the daily reality of women and girls in Syria.

It is also distressing to note that as many as 12 million people in Syria remain food insecure. At the same time, necessities such as water and electricity are in short supply, with millions having to live without them. The approaching winter season is a coming nightmare for many families living in camps, with more than 5 million said to be in urgent need of winterization support. Unfortunately, funding

shortages are inhibiting the ability of aid agencies to provide this critical humanitarian support to all those in need. The financial outlook of the Syria Humanitarian Assistance Response Plan remains grim in the face of increasing needs. With less than 30 per cent funding, humanitarian agencies are compelled to choose between the hungry and the starving. As a result of such difficult choices, 2.5 million Syrians who are food insecure are no longer receiving food or cash. The people of Syria still need our assistance. We renew our urgent appeal to the international community to support the humanitarian cause in the country to ease the pains of the needy population.

In pursuit of that cause, the A3 assures members of its full support for every modality of aid delivery that brings relief to the most vulnerable people. We enjoin the parties to work closely with the United Nations to create a safe and secure environment for the unimpeded delivery of humanitarian aid through all available modalities. We are cognizant of the fact that there is currently no substitute in size and scope to the cross-border aid delivery owing to the large number of beneficiaries under the mechanism. In view of its immense importance, the A3 entreats the Syrian national Government to renew the authorization for the use of the Bab Al-Salam, Al-Rai and Al-Hawa border crossings before they expire next month and in January 2024, respectively, to ensure uninterrupted flow of life-saving support into the area. However, notwithstanding the wider reach of the cross-border delivery mechanisms, the A3 is united in its view that aid delivery across the front lines is equally essential and must be increased to supplement the cross-border deliveries. In addition, considering the current funding challenges, it will greatly benefit many communities if donors prioritize early recovery and livelihood activities as a way of building their resilience to reduce dependence on external aid.

In conclusion, the A3 reiterates its collective call for a nationwide ceasefire and the immediate resumption of negotiations among the parties towards a political settlement that will bring comprehensive and lasting peace and stability to Syria in line with resolution 2254 (2015).

Ms. Gatt (Malta): Let me begin by thanking Special Envoy Pedersen and Director Wosornu for their briefings. At a time of escalated regional violence and tensions, their messages of practical steps towards peace and dignity are crucial.

Since we last met to discuss Syria (see S/PV.9426), a deadly increase in military activity has gripped the north-west of the country, most notably, the 5 October attack on a Syrian military graduation ceremony in the city of Homs. Hostilities and government strikes in the north-west have damaged critical infrastructure such as power and water networks. The Allouk water station is yet again non-functional. These attacks have also resulted in the killing of more than 61 civilians and the displacement of more than 100,000 people from 91 affected communities. Israeli airstrikes on Damascus and Aleppo international airports have further destabilized the situation in the region and have disrupted crucial United Nations Humanitarian Air Service flights for those working on the Syrian response. Put simply, the conflict continues to rage in Syria. A spillover from the ongoing tensions in Israel and Gaza can only further exacerbate an already volatile situation.

Within that context, the humanitarian situation across the country remains perilous. Millions lack water owing to chronic fuel shortages, violence and the impact of climate change. Ahead of the winter months, there remains an urgent need for winterization support for nearly 6 million internally displaced Syrians. There are 12.1 million people who remain food insecure, with 2.5 million no longer receiving food or cash transfers owing to underfunding.

Protection needs to remain at the heart of this crisis. As we heard today, acute protection needs for tens of thousands of displaced persons in the north-west remain largely unaddressed, with gender-based violence and early and forced marriage a daily reality for Syrian women and girls. Against that backdrop, we urge greater resourcing of the Syria Humanitarian Assistance Response Plan, which remains critically underfunded, at 29.4 per cent, as we have heard today from Director Wosornu. Greater humanitarian protection and early recovery, resilience and livelihood support are needed now more than ever. The humanitarian crossings at Bab Al-Hawa, Al-Salam and Al-Rai remain a critical lifeline for millions of the most vulnerable civilians in the north-west. Malta reaffirms its support for the delivery of humanitarian aid via all modalities and calls for the authorization of each of these crossings to be renewed for as long as the needs persist.

As outlined by Special Envoy Pedersen, only a political solution in line with resolution 2254 (2015) can resolve the root causes of this crisis and provide

the safety, dignity and justice that Syrians have long deserved. Notwithstanding the regional escalation of recent weeks, the momentum that has built towards the reconvening of the Syrian Constitutional Committee must be maintained. The body must resume its work without delay. All players, including the Astana format and the Arab contact group, must come together to continue the vital work of finding solutions to this conflict, which has caused too much misery, for too many, for too long. That must be accompanied by meaningful, coordinated, reciprocal and verifiable actions related to the steps-for-steps initiative. That includes progress on the missing, the disappeared and those arbitrarily detained in Syria.

In conclusion, Malta urges maximum restraint for all parties in Syria and the region at this time of escalation. We once again reiterate our call for a nationwide ceasefire in Syria and for parties to refrain from further action that could tip the region into greater calamity.

Mrs. Baeriswyl (Switzerland): I speak on behalf of Brazil and Switzerland, co-penholders of the Syrian humanitarian file.

We thank Special Envoy Geir Pedersen and the Director of the Operations and Advocacy Division of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), Edem Wosornu, for their briefings. We also acknowledge the presence of representatives from Syria, Türkiye and Iran at today's meeting.

Brazil and Switzerland remain deeply concerned about the deteriorating humanitarian situation in Syria and the increase in hostilities across the country. According to OCHA, the escalation of violence in the north-west has damaged several health facilities and schools and displaced more than 120,000 people across Idlib and western Aleppo. Unsurprisingly, with the lack of security and safety, aid operations have temporarily been disrupted and, sadly, three humanitarian aid workers have been killed, as have dozens of civilians. The north-east has also been affected by the increase in hostilities. Civilian infrastructure has been targeted, including water and power stations, farms, sites in the immediate vicinity of civilian villages and camps for internally displaced persons. The attacks, including those on infrastructure that is indispensable to the survival of the population, have caused displacement in both the north-east and the Government-controlled areas of Syria. Repeated strikes on the Aleppo and

Damascus airports have also more than once disrupted flights run by United Nations Humanitarian Air Service. Moreover, across the country, the escalation in hostilities has impacted aid delivery, as organizations have been forced to suspend activities owing to security concerns.

Any further escalation of hostilities will inevitably obstruct the delivery of life-saving assistance and pose immediate threats to the safety of aid workers and communities alike. It will increase the plight of the civilian population, which already faces a humanitarian crisis that is worse than ever in Syria's 12-year history of conflict. A long-lasting ceasefire across the country is the only way to prevent further deaths, injuries and human suffering. We call on all parties to respect their obligations under international humanitarian law and international human rights law, in particular to allow and facilitate the rapid and unimpeded passage of humanitarian relief for civilians in need across all Syria; to follow the rules related to the conduct of hostilities, in particular the prohibition of attacks against civilians and civilian infrastructure; and to guarantee the safety and well-being of the people living in Syria.

It is worrisome that the humanitarian response plan remains seriously underfunded, with only one third of the requested funds covered. The lack of resources is limiting the ability of the United Nations and its partners to support the population affected. All modalities of aid, including cross-border and cross-line aid, must be kept available in order for humanitarian organizations to be able to keep offering their much-needed assistance across Syria. We appreciate that deliveries of essential humanitarian aid continue to pass through the Bab Al-Hawa, Bab Al-Salam and Bab Al-Rai border-crossings. Given the large scale of needs, ensuring humanitarian access remains crucial. We trust that the authorization for the Bab Al-Salam and Bab Al-Rai border-crossings, which are due to expire on 13 November, will be renewed. We also reiterate the necessity of making predictable arrangements to respond to the ever-increasing humanitarian needs on the ground, which would be facilitated by open-ended or longer-term authorizations.

In conclusion, the humanitarian situation in Syria is dire and at continued risk of worsening. It is important to ensure that the recent developments in the region do not contribute to a further deterioration of the humanitarian situation in Syria. Amid the conflict and

crisis in the Middle East, let us not forget the people in Syria.

(spoke in French)

Allow me to make a statement in my national capacity on the political situation in Syria.

Switzerland is extremely concerned about the risk of escalation in the region as a result of the conflict in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory that began on 7 October. We support the efforts of Special Envoy Pedersen — whom I thank for his briefing — to shield Syria as much as possible from such a situation. The repeated attacks on Damascus and Aleppo airports over the past three weeks and the exchange of fire over the occupied Golan Heights are just one example of how the repercussions of the Middle East conflict are already being felt in Syria. We regret that the current situation is further hampering efforts to relaunch the political process and the work of the Constitutional Committee, as set forth in resolution 2254 (2015).

The security situation, in particular in the north of the country, has deteriorated sharply in recent weeks. In north-west Syria, the 5 October attack on a military academy in Homs resulted in the deaths of dozens of people, including many civilians. The bombardments that followed in various parts of the Idlib region and to the west of Aleppo have had serious repercussions for the civilian population and have led to major displacements. In the north-east, the surge in violence has also affected the population and civilian infrastructure. Respect for international humanitarian law and the protection of civilians are a priority for Switzerland. We therefore call on all parties to establish a nationwide ceasefire and ensure the protection of civilians. All parties must respect and uphold international humanitarian law and the principles of distinction, proportionality and precaution in the conduct of hostilities. The protection of the civilian population and civilian objects, including infrastructure essential to civilian survival, such as water supply, is imperative.

At a time of high tensions at the regional and international levels, we must listen to the voices of civil society, which alone is in a position to assess the situation on the ground and convey the aspirations, grievances and expectations of the population, particularly women. Switzerland therefore reiterates its support for civil society organizations operating inside and outside Syria, which play a critical role in easing the continuing tensions and conflicts in the country.

We welcome the communications role played by the Civil Society Support Room and the Women's Advisory Board, under the auspices of the United Nations Office at Geneva. Such platforms enable the voices of Syrian women and men to be heard at international level, including within the Council.

Lastly, Switzerland recalls that the implementation by all parties of confidence-building measures in line with resolution 2254 (2015), including the release of detainees and clarification of the fate of missing persons, is essential to pave the way for reconciliation in the country.

Ms. Dautllari (Albania): I thank Special Envoy Pedersen and Director Wosornu for their briefings.

We heard once again today the call for resuming the political process based on resolution 2254 (2015) and for the need for the Constitutional Committee to reconvene and achieve genuine progress. That is not just wishful thinking but a matter of life and death for the millions of Syrians who have been deprived of dignity and of their freedom and the means to rebuild their shattered lives. Albania reiterates its position that only a political solution based on resolution 2254 (2015) can bring an end to the suffering in Syria. We welcome the engagement of the Special Envoy and the contribution of the Women's Advisory Board in that regard, which can unlock and provide the necessary conditions to be met for the dignified and safe return of the refugees.

That can also ensure that justice is served for those responsible for war crimes, enforced displacement and torture, which is not just a moral imperative but a legal obligation under international law and a fundamental element of reconciliation and the prevention of inhumane crimes in the future. It can also provide some clarification for the families for whom the fate of their loved ones is unknown. Above all, only renewed political momentum, followed by a step-for-step approach, will guarantee sustainable solutions to the humanitarian and economic tragedy. The resumption of cross-border aid in north-west Syria through the Bab Al-Hawa crossing, although a positive note, is not enough. The other cross-border crossings of Bab Al-Salam and Bab Al-Rai should be extended beyond their deadlines, and the continuation of the predictable and measurable flow of life-saving humanitarian deliveries must be guaranteed for as long as needed.

We are deeply concerned about the intense and systematic artillery and missile attacks by the regime

in north-west Syria, which have added an extra layer of misery to the lives of ordinary Syrians, especially children and women and girls. In that context, we echo the call of the Special Envoy for de-escalation, a national ceasefire to be respected throughout the country and common sense to prevail.

As others mentioned earlier, the balances in the wider region are merely holding together, and the situation in the Middle East has placed dark clouds over regional peace and Syria's future. Here again, we join the call of the Special Envoy for all actors to exercise maximum restraint, and we stress that the regional and international actors involved must continue their efforts in order to respond wisely to this new reality and avoid any spillover effects in the wider region.

Mrs. Shino (Japan): As we heard from the briefings by Special Envoy Pedersen and Ms. Wosornu today, a number of alarming recent events have threatened the already precarious security and humanitarian environment in Syria. I thank both briefers for their detailed briefings.

First, the situation in Israel and Palestine has created a worrisome risk of regional spillover. There are already reports of exchanges of cross-border fire in the Golan Heights and strikes on the Damascus and Aleppo international airports. Japan will continue to work in close cooperation with the international community, including the United Nations, to calm the situation as soon as possible. Additionally, devastating drone attacks in Homs and retaliatory shelling over Idlib have caused hundreds of casualties, damage to civilian facilities and further displacement. This constitutes the largest escalation of hostilities in Syria in four years, according to the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic and Mr. Pedersen's briefing today. Japan echoes the Secretary-General's condemnation of all violence in Syria and reiterates his call for all the parties to respect their obligations under international law and protect civilians and civilian infrastructure at all times.

The latest violence is only worsening the already dire humanitarian situation in Syria. While Japan is pleased that United Nations aid deliveries into north-western Syria from Türkiye have continued this month, we encourage further vital assistance through all modalities, including cross-border and cross-line. It is truly regrettable that the Council could not agree to extend the cross-border aid mechanism in north-

western Syria in July. As the Syrian Government's consent for the use of the Bab Al-Salam and Al-Rai border crossings expires in November, we hope it will be extended. The lives of millions are at stake.

Regarding the political situation, Japan is disappointed that the Constitutional Committee has been unable to reconvene in Geneva or elsewhere and hopes that a venue can be agreed on as soon as possible. We further encourage Mr. Pedersen's intensive diplomatic efforts to facilitate progress in the step-for-step approach and relaunch a Syrian-led and Syrian-owned political process, in line with resolution 2254 (2015). Creating the conditions needed for the safe, dignified and voluntary return of refugees and internally displaced persons is also critical. We look forward to receiving more updates from the Secretary-General and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights regarding the independent institution to clarify the fate of missing persons in Syria.

Syria's rejoining of the League of Arab States has sparked hope for a realistic path towards peace and stability in Syria and beyond. In that regard, the role of the Arab contact group is crucial. However, Japan stresses the need for the Syrian Government to participate meaningfully and in good faith in these efforts to move the political process forward. Amid the many conflicts and crises around the world, we must not forget the plight of the Syrian people. The Council must remain engaged, and Japan will spare no effort to that end.

Dame Barbara Woodward (United Kingdom): I join others in thanking Special Envoy Pedersen and Director Wosornu for their briefings.

As we have heard today, this remains a live conflict and an entrenched humanitarian crisis. I want to set out three tangible steps that would improve the situation for the people of Syria and that overlap very closely with Special Envoy Pedersen's four priorities.

First, we need to ensure sustainable, predictable and efficient aid flows across the whole of Syria. There is no substitute for cross-border access to deliver for people in the north-west. Short-term, last-minute agreements are inappropriate. As Ms. Wosornu just said, we must insist that cross-border access is granted for as long as the humanitarian needs demand it, across all three crossing points. We have also heard that the humanitarian funding remains inadequate. The United Kingdom continues to be a top donor for Syrians in

humanitarian need, pledging up to \$180 million this year alone. But as a donor, we are concerned that 17 cents of every dollar in aid sent to United Nations agencies based in Damascus is being lost to the regime, which manipulates exchange rates for its benefit.

Secondly, at a fragile moment for the region, all parties should be focused on avoiding any further escalation of conflict elsewhere in the Middle East. We are concerned about reports of increased Iranian-affiliated militia activity and growing hostilities between Israel and militia groups in southern Syria. We call on the regime to prioritize de-escalation and focus on fostering stability and prosperity.

Thirdly, this backdrop of violence in the region underscores even more urgently the need for a viable political process in Syria. We call on the regime to act in good faith and engage. Attempts at normalization have so far not borne fruit. Insecurity persists, the Captagon trade continues, and the safe, dignified and voluntary return of refugees remains out of reach. The United Kingdom's position has not changed. We will not engage Damascus without evidence of genuine, consistent behaviour change.

Resolution 2254 (2015) provides the framework for delivering an inclusive and sustainable political process. The Constitutional Committee has been deadlocked for too long. We strongly support efforts to convene a meeting, with the Syrian parties alone, if necessary, in Geneva later this year.

Mr. Pérez Loose (Ecuador) (*spoke in Spanish*): We thank Special Envoy Geir Pedersen and Director Edem Wosornu of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs for their briefings. We welcome the presence in the Chamber today of the representatives of Iran, Syria and Türkiye.

Ecuador opposes the violence that is imperilling the lives and safety of civilians, and we echo the Secretary-General's call for all parties to be committed to ending the escalation of hostilities that is further complicating the political and humanitarian situation in Syria and the region. We extend our condolences to the victims of the attacks and violent incidents in Damascus and Aleppo, which resulted in the deaths of hundreds of civilians, including women and children.

We reiterate our support to Special Envoy Pedersen as he works for a negotiated solution to the conflict, in particular with the Astana group and the League

of Arab States. We commend the efforts under way to inspire political will among a broad spectrum of stakeholders within and outside Syria and measures aimed at achieving a ceasefire. We share his concern that the disruption of the political negotiation process threatens to reverse the progress made in previous months with regard to the possibility of reactivating the Constitutional Committee and other measures aimed at implementing the provisions of resolution 2254 (2015).

Syria is witnessing the worst escalation in armed violence of the past four years, according to information provided by the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic. In that regard, we believe it is essential to re-evaluate the strategies that will enable a return to constructive dialogue.

During the open debate on women and peace and security held last week (see S/PV.9452), we heard States discuss the importance of including women in all peacemaking and peacebuilding processes. The delicate and complex security situation in Syria is also an opportunity to ensure the full, safe, equal and meaningful participation of women and young people in all phases of the political negotiation process.

We note with concern the information provided by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs on the situation of the 15 million people who depend on humanitarian assistance to survive, the increase in the number of displaced persons due to the recent escalation of hostilities and the damage caused to schools and critical infrastructure in contravention of international humanitarian law. We encourage donors to continue contributing to the 2023 humanitarian response plan for Syria, which remains only 30 per cent funded just two months before the end of the year.

I conclude by recalling that, during November, the authorization of the opening of the Bab Al-Salam and Bab Al-Rai border crossings will expire, and the same goes for the Bab Al-Hawa crossing in December. We hope that access to north-west Syria will be maintained indefinitely, as well as guarantees of security and the freedom of movement for United Nations personnel and its associated agencies on the ground.

Mr. Geng Shuang (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I would like to thank Special Envoy Pedersen and Ms. Wosornu for their briefings.

In the light of the recent situation and the briefings we have just heard, I would like to make the following points.

First, no effort must be spared to avoid a spillover of tensions. The political process in Syria cannot advance without a stable regional environment. For some time now amid the escalating Palestinian-Israeli conflict, the tensions along the Syrian-Israeli border have been on the rise. A number of locations in Syria, including the airports in Damascus and Aleppo, have been subjected to frequent air strikes.

We call upon all parties concerned to exercise the maximum restraint in order to avoid a situation in which hotspots feed off each other and the conflict spreads, wreaking even greater havoc on regional security. We hope that countries outside the region, especially those with influence, will uphold the principles of objectivity and impartiality and play a constructive role in cooling off the situation. Calling for de-escalation while taking actions that exacerbate tensions is counterproductive.

Secondly, we must remain committed to advancing along the right path to seek a political solution. China firmly supports a Syrian-led and Syrian-owned political process, and therefore calls on all parties in Syria to strengthen dialogue, narrow their differences and make substantive progress in the work of the Constitutional Committee. We welcome the efforts of Special Envoy Pedersen, in line with his step-for-step initiative, to engage extensively with all parties on the implementation of resolution 2254 (2015). We support greater Arab solidarity and cooperation so as to give new impetus to finding a political solution to the Syrian issue.

Thirdly, we must resolutely combat the terrorist forces in Syria. China strongly condemns the terrorist attack on the Homs military academy carried out earlier this month. We firmly support the Syrian Government in taking the necessary measures to counter terrorism and maintain national security and stability. The international community, in accordance with international law and the relevant Security Council resolutions, should adopt uniform standards, step up counter-terror cooperation and combat terrorist forces within Syria, with a zero-tolerance approach. China opposes the interference of external forces in Syria's internal affairs, which undermines its security and stability, and opposes all illegal military presence,

unlawful military operations and the looting of natural resources in Syria.

China's position on the humanitarian issue in Syria is clear and consistent. We support the United Nations and the Syrian Government in maintaining positive engagement and — with full respect for Syria's sovereignty and the ownership of the Syrian Government — in properly implementing new arrangements for cross-border humanitarian relief. All parties should also step up their efforts to remove any obstacles to cross-line aid delivery. To date, humanitarian aid for Syria is grossly underfunded. We call upon the relevant donors to honour their commitments and support humanitarian action and early-recovery projects throughout Syria.

Unilateral sanctions have weakened the Syrian Government's ability to mobilize resources and conduct reconstruction efforts. Their negative impact on the humanitarian situation in Syria cannot be ignored or denied. Those sanctions must therefore be lifted without delay and without conditions.

Mrs. Broadhurst Estival (France) (*spoke in French*): I thank Mr. Pedersen and Ms. Wosornu for their briefings.

I would like to focus on three points.

The current situation in Gaza runs the risk of disrupting the entire region, but an escalation that would drag the region into a war with incalculable consequences for all its populations is not inevitable. All members of the Council must redouble their diplomatic efforts to avoid such a catastrophic scenario, and France is working to do just that. The recent clashes in Syria and the mobilization of armed groups on the border with Israel raise the risk of the conflict spreading to the Syrian theatre. The opening of a new front against Israel in Syria would aggravate the destabilization of the country and the people of Syria would once again find themselves the primary victims.

The war in Gaza must not lead us to turn a blind eye to the continuing violence in Syria and against Syrians. The regime's bombings in the Idlib region are unjustifiable. Those bombings killed dozens of civilians, including children, caused widespread damage to civilian infrastructure and forcibly displaced many more people.

As the Special Envoy reminded us, a cessation of hostilities throughout Syria, in accordance with the

relevant Council resolutions, is essential. That objective must go hand in hand with advancing a credible and inclusive political process in line with resolution 2254 (2015). Regional tensions must not distract us from that goal. I recall my country's support for Mr. Pedersen's mediation efforts, as well as his desire to reconvene the Constitutional Committee.

The conditions for a voluntary, safe and dignified return of refugees to their country must be met. Damascus must constantly demonstrate its concrete and verifiable commitment in that direction. Words must be translated into actions. France continues to provide its support to those countries hosting the millions of Syrian refugees.

The resumption of the delivery of humanitarian aid to north-west Syria is good news, but the aid arriving in that part of Syria remains insufficient and falls short of what was previously transported under the cross-border mechanism. That is a major concern ahead of the arrival of the winter season, when 5.7 million people will need humanitarian assistance. We must help humanitarian actors meet all of the population's needs. It is also necessary that the Syrian regime unconditionally renew in November its authorization for the two crossing points at Bab Al-Salam and Bab Al-Rai. Humanitarian access must be permanent, safe and unhindered.

It is essential that the Council remain seized of this matter and that the Secretariat report in writing to the Council on the humanitarian response in Syria.

Mr. Abushahab (United Arab Emirates) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to thank Mr. Geir Pedersen and Ms. Edem Wosornu for their valuable briefings.

Our meeting today is being held as our region experiences one of the most difficult crises in its contemporary history. We are witnessing another devastating war in which civilians are suffering terribly in Gaza. Concerns mount with every passing day in which the war is not brought to an end about the possibility of the entire region sliding into a regional war, the damage of which would be tremendous for everyone.

The growing tensions in the occupied Syrian Golan and other neighbouring areas in the past few weeks have confirmed the urgency of addressing the various crises in our region, including in Syria. Syria, which is still suffering from the repercussions of more than 13

years of war, cannot afford to become another front for settling geopolitical scores. The Syrian crisis is one of the most complex files on the Council's agenda, owing largely to foreign interference. Any new escalation would impede our ultimate goal of achieving peace and security in Syria and the entire region. The United Arab Emirates supports the efforts of the Special Envoy and the Arab contact group to convene meetings of the Constitutional Committee at the end of this year. That would strengthen the dialogue between the Syrian parties with a view to ending the crisis through a Syrian-led and Syrian-owned process without foreign interference. We stress that a political solution is the only way to do that.

In the context of the recent increase in tensions and hostilities in Syria, my country stresses the importance of de-escalation and ensuring a ceasefire in all parts of Syria, and of refraining from targeting vital facilities, especially the Aleppo and Damascus airports, so as to not hinder the delivery of humanitarian aid. The United Arab Emirates also stresses the importance of combating terrorist threats in Syria, especially as the Da'esh organization continues to launch attacks aimed at undermining security and stability there.

The United Arab Emirates reiterates its firm condemnation of the terrorist attack on the Homs military academy. We denounce those criminal acts and firmly reject all forms of violence and terrorism. We also express our sincere condolences and sympathy to the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic, our brother people of Syria and the families of the victims killed in that heinous crime and wish the injured a speedy recovery. It is unfortunate that the Security Council has not clearly condemned that terrorist attack.

The economic situation in Syria has continued to deteriorate every year, thanks to multiple factors that include higher prices for fuel, commodities and food as well as the unprecedented decline in value of the Syrian pound. The situation demands that the international community explore ways to boost Syria's economy, which in turn would improve the humanitarian and living conditions of the Syrian people.

We also stress the importance of restoring Syria's water and electricity networks, which are essential for providing humanitarian services. In that regard, we express our appreciation for the continued efforts of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and the Syrian Government to seamlessly deliver

humanitarian aid through the three crossings at the Syria-Türkiye border. The deadline of the agreement on opening the Bab Al-Salam and Al-Rai crossings is approaching next month, and we therefore hope it will be further extended. That will be essential to ensuring that the needs of the Syrian people are met, especially with winter approaching and the current scarcity of basic resources and livelihoods. We reiterate the importance of using all possible means to deliver aid, including by ensuring the cross-line delivery of convoys. We urge for increasing the numbers of those convoys based on the humanitarian needs on the ground.

In conclusion, the current critical juncture in our region requires that we intensify our efforts to prevent any escalation of tensions. That includes preventing Syria from sliding into a regional war and simultaneously working to make progress on finding peaceful solutions to all the crises in the region.

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

Brazil associates itself with the statement delivered by the Swiss delegation, in its capacity as co-penholder of the Syrian humanitarian file. I would now like to speak in my national capacity on the political aspects of the Syrian conflict.

I thank Mr. Pedersen and Ms. Wosornu for their comprehensive briefings and commend their work, and I welcome the delegations of Iran, Syria and Türkiye to this meeting.

We in the Security Council are holding this meeting at a moment of a dangerous escalation of violence in Syria and the region. Indeed, the recent developments in Syria are cause for grave concern. On 5 October, we learned with distress of the terrorist attack on a graduation ceremony at the military academy in Homs, which left more than 100 dead, including civilians and children. Brazil would like to express its condolences to the relatives and friends of the victims and reiterates its firm repudiation of any acts of terrorism or attacks on the civilian population. The situation in northern Syria has deteriorated even more. In the country's north-west, there have been reports of air strikes in Idlib, with civilian casualties and great damage to civilian infrastructure, as well as attacks by the Security Council-listed terrorist group Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham. In the north-east there have been worrisome reports of violence, including strikes affecting civilian infrastructure.

Since the hostilities between Israel and Hamas began, Syria has been affected by the conflict on more than one occasion. Strikes on the Aleppo and Damascus airports have disrupted United Nations Humanitarian Air Service flights more than once. Strikes on facilities in eastern Syria were reported some days ago. Sadly, as those events indicate, the situation in Syria remains very volatile, with dire consequences for the civilian population. The risk of a regional spillover of the Israel-Hamas conflict is real and cause for deep concern.

In that context of growing instability, we renew our appeal to all sides to exercise maximum restraint. We want to emphasize that Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity must be respected, in accordance with international law and the relevant resolutions of the Council. We also recall that all sides must comply with their obligations under international law and ensure the protection of civilians and civilian infrastructure. We have repeatedly stated that there can be no military solution to the Syrian conflict. In the light of the unfolding humanitarian crisis and the deteriorating security conditions in Syria, an immediate and comprehensive ceasefire is urgently needed. The Syrian people cannot afford further losses or additional damage to critical infrastructure.

At the same time, renewed political will is essential to a resumption of a credible intra-Syrian political process, especially through the reconvening of the Constitutional Committee. In that spirit, we encourage all the parties to work for a resumption of the United Nations-facilitated political process. We concur with the Special Envoy that the status quo in Syria is unsustainable and that without a meaningful political path to the implementation of resolution 2254 (2015), we risk a further deterioration of the situation in the country. That would have detrimental effects for the region, especially in the current volatile context. Diplomacy and true political will must be given a true chance.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

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

Mr. Dandy (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): At a time when the world is watching the ongoing and dangerous Israeli aggression in our region, the occupation forces have committed dozens of massacres and brutal crimes in the Gaza Strip. Israel

keeps inflaming the region by escalating its attacks on the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Syria. The Israeli occupation launched four attacks on Damascus and Aleppo international civilian airports in just 10 days, putting the airports out of service, threatening the lives of passengers and endangering the safety of civil aviation. It has also disrupted United Nations humanitarian operations. The Syrian Arab Republic therefore cautions once more against continuing with these attacks and calls on the Security Council to break its silence and assume its responsibilities to condemn such attacks, put an end to them and hold the perpetrators accountable. It also considers that the provision by the United States of America and certain other countries of blanket protection and impunity to Israel makes them partners in bearing responsibility for those grave violations of international law and the Charter of the United Nations.

In conjunction with those Israeli attacks, terrorist organizations continue to commit crimes against the Syrian people. On the fifth of this month, with the support of countries whose identities are well known — foremost among them the United States of America — those organizations committed one of the most heinous and bloody crimes, as it targeted the military academy graduation ceremony in Homs with explosive-laden drones, leading to dozens of martyrs and injuring hundreds of military personnel and their civilian families who had been invited to attend the ceremony, among them women and children. The Syrian Arab Republic reaffirms that this heinous act of terrorism will not deter it from pursuing its efforts to completely eradicate terrorism from its territories.

In the same context, the United States of America continues its flagrant violations of Syria's sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity by maintaining its illegal military presence on Syrian territories and supporting separatist militias in north-eastern Syria, which recently bombed two water stations in Deir ez-Zor governorate using drones, putting them out of service and depriving tens of thousands of Syrian citizens of drinking water. That is, of course, not to mention the fact that the United States of America sent its delegations to infiltrate Syrian territories surreptitiously and illegally. We had previously informed the Council of the infiltration by a United States delegation led by Ethan Goldrich, the United States Deputy Assistant Secretary of State. That proves beyond a shadow of a doubt the subversive role played in Syria by the United States of America,

which aims to prolong the crisis and increase the Syrian people's suffering.

The United States of America and the European Union also continue to impose illegal and inhumane unilateral coercive measures on all vital sectors, thereby targeting the most basic human rights, with the aim of depriving Syrian citizens of their right to food, health, education and development, causing them great and unprecedented economic and humanitarian suffering, compounded by the theft and plunder by the United States of Syrian national wheat, oil and gas resources with unparalleled insolence.

As part of its efforts to improve the humanitarian situation, the Syrian Government continues to strengthen its cooperation with the United Nations, its agencies and programmes, including by granting them the necessary approvals to facilitate their work throughout Syria. In that context, the Government took a sovereign decision to grant the United Nations permission to use three border crossings and two internal cross-line crossings, thereby enabling the continued flow of humanitarian aid to Syrian civilians in need. However, despite all those facilities provided by the Syrian Government, the entry of humanitarian aid through the Bab Al-Hawa crossing has been delayed for more than two months, and only a single convoy has made a cross-line delivery, clearly revealing that there are parties that are preventing the Syrian people from having their humanitarian needs met. That is why Syria stresses the need to exert maximum pressure on terrorist organizations and their sponsors in north-western Syria to ensure that humanitarian aid reaches those in need.

United Nations efforts face a real problem, proving that the decline in funding is a major obstacle to the capacity of United Nations programmes and agencies to fulfil their mandates, as the humanitarian response plan is funded at less than 30 per cent to date. It is as if someone is deliberately prolonging the critical humanitarian situation in Syria, especially after the earthquake in February. We need to provide sustainable solutions that support Syrians, reduce dependence on life-saving humanitarian assistance and increase their resilience.

Syria reiterates that it welcomes the return of every Syrian refugee forced to leave the country owing to the practices of terrorist organizations and the negative effects of unilateral coercive measures. In that regard,

the Syrian Government continues to take all necessary measures to facilitate the return of refugees and continues to cooperate and coordinate with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), including by strengthening the channels of communication and consultation with UNHCR to effectively address refugees' main concerns. Syria also stresses that conditions conducive to the voluntary and dignified return of refugees must be created, including by lifting unilateral coercive measures and promoting early recovery projects, including financing for demining and the removal of explosive remnants.

As for the human suffering in the Rukban camp, the United States forces illegally present on Syrian territories bear responsibility for that. Ending the suffering will be done through the closure of that camp. That is also the case with the Al-Hol camp in the north-east, which is controlled by separatist militias with the support of those forces. It must also be closed after the countries of origin have assumed their responsibility to repatriate their detained nationals. Syria condemns all those reckless United States practices, including its support for terrorist groups and separatist militias, and its quest to maintain the status quo at that camp.

Overcoming the repercussions of the Syrian crisis will require sincere political will on the part of certain Council members to stop the repeated and systematic Israeli attacks; to end the illegal presence of forces on Syrian territories; to immediately and unconditionally lift unilateral coercive measures; and to support the efforts of the Syrian State and its institutions to improve the humanitarian situation by meeting the humanitarian needs of Syrians without discrimination, including through the fulfilment of donor pledges to fund the humanitarian response plan and scaling up early recovery projects.

Before concluding, I would like to refer to the statement of the United States of America. We heard the representative's claims regarding the so-called right of self-defence of United States forces on Syrian territories. The representative seems to have forgotten that her forces are illegally present on Syrian territories. The United States appears to be giving itself the right to have its forces present anywhere and at any time, without any consent and in complete violation of international law.

The representative gave the excuse that her forces are there to combat Da'esh, which is a 100 per cent United

States product par excellence. I would like to remind the Ambassador of the United States of her country's dark history, especially in our Middle East region. Her country destroyed Iraq using specious arguments, and recently, it has given Israel total and unequivocal support. Over the past few days, the United States has not only obstructed the Security Council's effort to protect the Palestinian people, but was also quick to strengthen the Israeli war machine by sending its aircraft carriers to the region and providing Israel with military equipment and advanced vehicles, in addition to allocating billions of dollars in financial support.

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

Mr. Iravani (Islamic Republic of Iran): I thank Special Envoy Pedersen and Ms. Wosornu for their updates and informative briefings.

Regrettably, after 12 years of the Syrian crisis, terrorism remains a significant and persistent threat to Syria and the broader region, with its core activities concentrated in regions outside the control of the Syrian Government. We are concerned about terrorist activities in the areas under occupation. The illegal presence of the United States military forces in Syria is the primary source of insecurity in the country and has provided fertile ground for the nourishment of terrorist organizations, within both the country and the broader region. The Syrian Arab Republic has officially and consistently raised objections to those violations and has called upon the Security Council to halt the aggression and put an end to the United States occupation. The fight against terrorism must be carried out in full respect of Syria's national sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence, and without using it as a pretext to violate those fundamental principles of international law.

Iran strongly condemns the reprehensible terrorist attacks perpetrated by terrorist organizations targeting the graduation ceremony for the military academy cadets in the city of Homs on 4 October. That cowardly act of terrorism has tragically resulted in numerous losses of life and injuries, including civilians, military personnel and their innocent family members. It is deeply regrettable that the Council continues to exhibit political double standards and refuses to condemn such heinous and horrifying crimes. Furthermore, Iran condemns in the strongest terms the continuous acts of terrorism carried out by the Israeli regime

within Syrian territory, deliberately targeting innocent civilians and vital infrastructure. The most recent attack was conducted in Idlib last night. Such acts of aggression are a serious threat to regional peace and security. While concurrently committing war crimes and crimes against humanity in the Gaza Strip, the Israeli regime conducted aggressive operations aimed at civilian airports in Damascus and Aleppo. Those terrorist attacks inflicted severe damage on essential airport facilities, causing significant disruptions to their operations for a considerable period of time. Tragically, the assaults also led to the injury or death of several innocent civilians.

The humanitarian crisis in Syria remains deeply concerning. Currently, one of the most urgent issues facing the country is the severe economic hardship, which is significantly worsened by the Caesar Syria Civilian Protection Act sanctions. Those sanctions have placed a disproportionate burden on the Syrian people, particularly women and children. Those illegal measures have sadly transformed into instruments that terrorize nations and erode the bedrock of international law. We are also concerned about the current level of funding for the Syrian humanitarian response, which falls far below what is needed. The severe shortage of funding severely hinders the ability of the United Nations to provide adequate assistance to those in need. Therefore, the provision of impartial and non-politicized humanitarian assistance to all regions of Syria is crucial to saving lives. We stress that humanitarian assistance and reconstruction initiatives in Syria should not be wielded as tools to exert pressure on the Syrian Government.

On the political track, we hold a steadfast belief that the essential solution to the Syrian crisis should be pursued through diplomatic and political means, as a military solution has the potential to exacerbate an already-complex situation. We highlight the significance of resuming Constitutional Committee meetings as an effective mechanism for advancing the political process. The Committee's continued functioning is vital, with its venue being of lesser importance. The role of the United Nations should remain supportive, with the entire process being under Syrian leadership and ownership.

We support the return of Syrian refugees to their homeland. At present, there are a significant number of Syrian refugees in Türkiye, Lebanon and Jordan, and their return should be facilitated through the cooperative

efforts of all host countries. Addressing the numerous challenges confronting Syrian refugees requires the creation of critical infrastructure. The United Nations, and especially the Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees, plays a pivotal role in that endeavour.

I wish to emphasize the importance of respecting the territorial integrity, national sovereignty and independence of the Syrian Arab Republic. Iran reaffirms its steadfast commitment to the fight against terrorism.

To conclude, in response to the unfounded allegations made against my country by the representative of the United States during today's meeting, we are obliged to emphatically refute those unsubstantiated claims. They have no basis and are completely without merit. The United States attempts to shift the blame from the culprit to the victim and point the finger at Iran. Iran has consistently upheld its commitments to promoting peace and security in the region. Iran's presence in Syria is fully legal and in response to an official request from the Syrian Government to combat terrorism. The effectiveness of Iran's anti-terrorism efforts, particularly against terrorist groups such as Da'esh, is evident to all. In stark contrast, the unlawful presence of the United States in Syria, purportedly for counter-terrorism purposes but in support of terrorist organizations, flagrantly violates the principles of the Charter of the United Nations, international law and Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity. That destabilizing presence has had adverse repercussions for both Syria and the entire region. The Syrian Arab Republic has officially and consistently raised objections to those violations and has called upon the Council to halt the aggression and put an end to the United States occupation. The United States must rectify its transgressions of international law and the Charter by discontinuing its support for terrorist groups and withdrawing from the north-eastern region of Syria.

It is indeed the United States that is seeking to increase escalation by overtly aligning itself with the aggressor at the expense of the innocent Palestinian people. The United States and some Western countries are attempting to equate the self-defence and right to self-determination of the Palestinian people and the Palestinian resistance with terrorism, attempting to grant the occupying regime, Israel, an unjust right to self-defence. The United States' unwavering support for occupation and aggression has rendered it a part of the

problem and the challenge the international community is facing in the current situation in the Gaza Strip.

To be clear, Iran's primary objective is to avoid any escalation in the region. That is why Iran has aligned with the international community to endorse the call for an immediate end to Israel's relentless military aggression, establishing a ceasefire and providing unhindered access to humanitarian aid to the people in need in the Gaza Strip. However, should it confront any threat, attack or aggression endangering its security, national interests or its people, Iran will not hesitate to use its inherent rights under international law and the United Nations Charter to respond decisively.

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

Mrs. Özgür (Türkiye): The international community's continued attention to the humanitarian situation in Syria is crucial.

The conditions remain especially dire in the north-west, where 4.1 million people need critical life-saving humanitarian assistance. An increasing number of attacks by the regime in the greater Idlib area have disrupted essential services. Therefore, the safe and uninterrupted continuation of United Nations cross-border humanitarian assistance, as long as it is needed, is a humanitarian imperative. The non-extension of the Council mandate last July (see S/PV.9371) led to significant uncertainty and risks to this critical operation. Eight shipments had to stop for more than two months, and that disruption occurred just a few months after the earthquakes, leading to further disruption in the region. Going forward, the Syrian regime and the members of the Security Council have important responsibilities to eliminate the risks.

In that context, we expect the continued use of the Bab Al-Hawa, Bab Al-Salam and Bab Al-Rai border crossings for United Nations aid deliveries beyond the mid-November and January 2024 time limits. That is especially critical given the approaching winter months, when humanitarian needs are typically at their highest. The international community, especially the Security Council, should closely follow the course of that operation and should stand ready to step in if needed. The continued monitoring and reporting of cross-border aid deliveries by the United Nations, in line with existing modalities, are also critical to ensure the transparency and oversight of that massive operation.

As with all large-scale humanitarian operations, humanitarian funding is another fundamental requirement for effective cross-border assistance to Syria. The humanitarian response plan for Syria is funded to less than 30 per cent, which is a source of concern. We reiterate our call for sufficient and sustained funding so that the United Nations can continue to carry out its humanitarian operations for the millions of Syrians in need.

The developments in the Middle East since 7 October have once again painfully reminded us that recurring cycles of crisis, hostilities and violence are inevitable if political solutions are not developed to address the root causes of conflicts. That reality should always be kept in mind when dealing with the Syrian crisis as well. The fact is that the root causes of the Syrian conflict are political. The Syrian people have legitimate aspirations that remain unmet after 12 years of conflict. In the absence of national reconciliation, Syria will continue to suffer from the repercussions of an ongoing conflict. Current escalation in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict brings new risks for the wider region, and Syria is not immune to those risks. Special attention is required in the current critical juncture so that the spiral of violence does not drag Syria into further instability. The formula for ending the Syrian conflict is clear. The international community must ensure simultaneous progress on the following three tracks: the revitalization of the political process in line with resolution 2254 (2015); the creation of conditions for the safe, voluntary and dignified return of Syrian refugees; and the destruction of the malign and separatist agenda of the terrorist organizations in order to preserve Syria's territorial integrity and unity.

We have international consensus on the significance of implementing resolution 2254 (2015). For that, we must work together to reactivate the Constitutional Committee, which is the only platform that brings the Syrian opposition and the regime together under the facilitation of the United Nations, as soon as possible. The opposition is a building block in the political process without which there can be no national reconciliation; therefore, it should not be sidelined. We remain in close contact with Special Envoy Pedersen in his efforts to create momentum on the political track.

Currently, the biggest threats to the territorial integrity of Syria and the prospects of a united and peaceful future for that country are the terrorist organizations operating on its soil. Through its activities

inside Syria, the Kurdistan Workers' Party/Democratic Union Party (PKK/PYD) and its offshoot, the so-called Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), constitute the textbook example of separatist terrorist organizations. They kill and maim civilians, oppress and terrorize local populations, and abduct and recruit children. The PKK bans school curricula, closes Arabic-teaching schools, arrests teachers and releases Da'esh members in exchange for bribes. Türkiye shares 911 kilometres of land border with Syria. The presence of the PKK/PYD terrorist organization in that country, just beyond our borders, poses a vital threat to our national security.

That terrorist organization has been using the refuge and the support it receives in Syria to attack Türkiye. The terrorists who perpetrated the attack in front of the

Ministry of the Interior in Ankara on 1 October were trained in Syria and entered Türkiye from Syria. The Kurdistan Workers' Party/People's Protection Units also continues to launch terrorist attacks from the areas of Tal Rifat and Manbij. Türkiye conducts counter-terrorism operations against PKK-PYD terrorism in exercise of its inherent right to self-defence, in line with article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations and relevant Security Council resolutions. Those operations exclusively target terrorists and terrorist capabilities that are directly linked to the functioning and financing of that terrorist organization. We are determined not to allow it to find safe haven along our borders.

The meeting rose at 12.05 p.m.