



# Security Council

Seventy-ninth year

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New York

*Provisional*

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<i>President:</i>	Mrs. Baeriswyl . . . . .	(Switzerland)
<i>Members:</i>	Algeria . . . . .	Mr. Bendjama
	China . . . . .	Mr. Geng Shuang
	Ecuador . . . . .	Mr. De La Gasca
	France . . . . .	Mr. De Rivière
	Guyana . . . . .	Mrs. Rodrigues-Birkett
	Japan . . . . .	Mr. Yamazaki
	Malta . . . . .	Mr. Camilleri
	Mozambique . . . . .	Mr. Fernandes
	Republic of Korea . . . . .	Mr. Sangjin Kim
	Russian Federation . . . . .	Mr. Nebenzia
	Sierra Leone . . . . .	Mr. Sowa
	Slovenia . . . . .	Mrs. Blokar Drobic
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland . .	Dame Barbara Woodward
	United States of America . . . . .	Mr. Wood

## Agenda

The situation in the Middle East

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*The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.*

### **Adoption of the agenda**

*The agenda was adopted.*

### **The situation in the Middle East**

**The President** (*spoke in French*): 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; Ms. Edem Wosornu, Director of Operations and Advocacy, Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs; Ms. Abir Haj Ibrahim, Syrian woman peacebuilder; and Ms. Su'ad Jarbawi, Regional Vice-President for the Middle East and North Africa, International Rescue Committee.

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

I give the floor to Mr. Pedersen.

**Mr. Pedersen:** The fires of conflict are raging in the occupied Palestinian territory, including Gaza, and in Lebanon. And the heat is being felt in the Syrian Arab Republic too. Spiralling escalation is already having a major impact on Syria and Syrian civilians. I want to issue a clear warning: regional spillover into Syria is alarming and could get much worse, with serious implications for Syria and international peace and security. Syria demands our collective attention.

Hundreds of thousands of Syrians and Lebanese have fled Lebanon into Syria — into a country that is itself experiencing escalating conflict. The past month has seen the fastest paced and broadest ranging campaign of Israeli airstrikes in the past 13 years. Dozens of locations across Syria have been hit, including residential areas, even in the heart of Damascus. In total, the Syrian Government says that Israel has hit Syrian territory more than 116 times since 7 October 2023, which they say has resulted in the deaths of more than 100 people.

In the Golan, some construction activity has been carried out by the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) in the vicinity of the area of separation. During that activity,

the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) observed an Israeli battle tank and excavators cross the ceasefire line, into the area of separation. There were also reports of the IDF carrying out at least one drone strike in the area of separation. Pursuant to the 1974 Agreement on Disengagement between Israeli and Syrian Forces, no military forces, equipment or activity by either Israel or Syria are permitted in the area of separation.

Meanwhile, late September saw a report of a rocket attack from Syrian territory into the Occupied Syrian Golan, while the IDF also claimed to have shot down drones launched from Syria towards Israel. Israel says that its actions address targets linked to the Islamic Republic of Iran or Hizbullah, accusing them of smuggling arms into Lebanon from Syria. However, the Syrian Government and many monitors have highlighted the heavy impact on civilians, with alarming reports of civilian deaths and casualties from Israeli strikes and damage to some civilian and economic infrastructure. Israel's strikes on the road between Beirut and Damascus have hindered the passage of civilians seeking to flee and also strangled a critical commercial artery between the two countries. We are now seeing decreasing commercial traffic and gasoline prices doubling in Syria.

Regional escalation appears to also have been catalysing conflict in northwest Syria in a dangerous manner. There was a significant cross-line raid into government areas by Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham, which is listed by the Security Council as a terrorist group, alongside reports of drones out of Idlib and ongoing artillery and rocket fire. The Russian Federation has since resumed airstrikes for the first time in months and pro-government forces have significantly accelerated drone strikes and shelling. There have been alarming reports of civilian casualties, significant civilian displacements and damage to civilian infrastructure, including an electricity power plant feeding a water station. The northeast is also touched by regional escalation, with reports of attacks resuming on military bases of the United States of America there, prompting reported United States artillery fire. This is aggravating tensions in an area that was already seeing elevated hostilities between the Syrian Democratic Forces, government forces and armed opposition groups, as well as some reports of Turkish drone strikes.

The worsening situation across several fronts also makes it harder to combat Security Council-listed

terrorist groups such as the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant, which still pose a serious threat.

In short, we are seeing all the ingredients for a military, humanitarian and economic storm breaking out in an already devastated Syria, with dangerous and unpredictable consequences for civilians and international peace and security. I have five urgent appeals in that regard.

First, Syria must be sheltered from regional conflict. I repeat my call for respect for the sovereignty, unity, independence and territorial integrity of Syria. Syria cannot become a free-for-all venue where different actors settle their scores or fuel other theatres, or a staging ground for attacks or retaliation.

Secondly, regional tensions must be de-escalated now. I echo the Secretary-General's call for immediate ceasefires in Gaza and Lebanon. I also express grave concern about the prospect of further escalations between Israel and Iran and what that could trigger as regards to Syria.

Thirdly, there is a risk that regional escalation could unravel ceasefire agreements that, however imperfectly, have provided for a vital freeze of front lines within Syria for almost four years. Further work is needed to de-escalate towards a nationwide ceasefire in line with resolution 2254 (2015). Alongside it, we also need to see a cooperative approach to combating Security Council-listed terrorist groups in line with international law.

Fourthly, all actors — Syrian and international, including Israel — must comply with international humanitarian law, including the principles of distinction, proportionality and precaution. I deplore the civilian deaths, numbers of which are rising again, and the damage to civilian infrastructure.

Fifthly and finally, let me also recall the importance of the presence of the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force and stress the need for both parties to abide by the terms of the Disengagement Agreement. Violations of the agreement could increase tensions between the parties and lead to a further escalation of the situation in the region.

I recently conveyed these same messages in clear terms to members of the ceasefire task force in Geneva, including Russia, Türkiye, the United States and Iran, building on all my engagements in New York last month.

Amid that dangerous kinetic environment, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) says that some 425,000 people crossed into Syria in recent weeks, fleeing Israeli air strikes and violence. Around 72 per cent of them are Syrians and the remainder mostly Lebanese. It goes without saying that Syrians must be protected wherever they are, including those who are moving and those who have remained where they are. The world is closely watching to see whether the concerns that Syrian refugees themselves have long expressed will be meaningfully addressed in this new situation. I hope that all stakeholders understand that this is indeed a critical moment for all to act responsibly and constructively.

We have always stressed that there are two areas of concern that refugees cite. One set is related to protection, arising from fears of arbitrary arrest, mandatory military conscription and housing, land and property rights. The other set is related to livelihoods, arising from a lack of basic services, health care, water, electricity and inadequate housing. In that regard, let me first echo High Commissioner Grandi's appreciation for the Government keeping the borders open for everyone and for simplifying certain procedures, working with UNHCR. Of course, more will be needed on the full range of protection issues.

Indeed, let me also stress, as the High Commissioner has, the need to continue over time to ensure the safety and security of all those arriving from Lebanon — not only upon crossing, but thereafter. Let me also stress that the appeal applies to all authorities and de facto authorities. In the same vein, let me also underline the need for unimpeded access through all modalities.

Secondly, let me also echo the appeal by the United Nations for donors to give generously. Both those who are moving and the communities into which they are entering are often facing conditions of utter misery. Emergency humanitarian aid and early-recovery activities need substantial resources for recent arrivals and for the millions of Syrians who are suffering. The generosity of donors to date is appreciated, but much more will be needed. Moreover, that appeal applies to all areas of Syria.

Let me also underline the need for active engagement by sanctioning States to mitigate and avoid the adverse effects of sanctions, particularly in the form of overcompliance.

The latest developments serve as a stark reminder of Syria's deep fragility. Partial, piecemeal or conflict management approaches alone cannot tackle the scale of the ever-mounting challenges that Syria faces. Syria remains in a state of profound conflict, with Syrians divided politically and across different areas and under enormous stresses of many kinds. There is obviously no quick fix for those challenges. Unless the long-stalled Syrian-owned and -led political process facilitated by the United Nations resumes and begins to move forward, I fear we will continue to see Syria beset by crisis upon crisis with no end. Instead, now — today — would be exactly the time to de-escalate and to send a new signal to the Syrian people and the international community that the search for a political settlement is meaningfully resuming.

What could that look like? It would mean Syrians coming together again within the Constitutional Committee. I raised specific ideas on that during consultations with the Syrian parties here in New York last month, and I continue to pursue it. It means taking seriously the promise of genuine confidence-building, step-for-step, among Syrian and international stakeholders. Beyond that, it also means developing a new and comprehensive path out of the conflict — one that tackles the Syrian-owned and -led political issues at the heart of the conflict with United Nations facilitation and without foreign interference, as well as the sovereignty, security, civilian protection and economic issues, in which outside stakeholders are also deeply involved. We need constructive international diplomacy in support of the core of the matter: a United Nations-facilitated intra-Syrian process to advance resolution 2254 (2015).

During high-level week, I discussed urgent de-escalation and ways of advancing the political process with the Syrian Foreign Minister and the Syrian Negotiations Commission. I also did so with the Russian, Turkish and Iranian Foreign Ministers, meeting in the Astana format, and with Arab Foreign Ministers and with officials from the United States and Europe and other countries.

One process that continues is the active work of the men and women from Syrian civil society who tirelessly serve their country and their communities. I thank Switzerland for its support of our efforts to facilitate processes of inclusion, dialogue and cooperation among Syrian civil society, particularly through the Civil Society Support Room. I very much look forward to

hearing from Ms. Abir Haj Ibrahim, who will briefing us a little bit later. Many of the priorities of my Office are informed by the insights shared by members of civil society, and it is our honour to support and work with them.

The same is true of the Women's Advisory Board members, whose insights and energy we continue to rely upon and who work together across different lines. Last week, they spoke to me from all corners of Syria, and outside of the country too, conveying the effects of the latest crisis on their communities. Syrians are stepping up to support arrivals from Lebanon, in an already economically strained environment, amid fears of further military and regional escalation. Syrian women continue to identify opportunities for the political process to move forward, build trust and give voice to the voiceless. And everywhere, Syrian women are on the front lines, bearing the burden of this conflict for their communities and families, while advocating for an end to violence. This month, as we mark the passage of 24 years since the adoption of resolution 1325 (2000), we recommit ourselves to the meaningful political participation of women in the Syrian political process. I remind the Syrian parties and all Security Council members that sustainable peace comes only when the outcomes of a political process reflect the evolution and sacrifice of all members of a society.

In conclusion, let me remind the Council that Syrians today need the urgent protection provided by de-escalation and the support needed to face crisis upon crisis. And they need an inclusive and comprehensive political path out of the conflict, including through the implementation of resolution 2254 (2015), that restores Syria's sovereignty, restores the dignity of the long-suffering Syrian people and enables them to independently shape their country's future and contributes to stability in the region. As we seek to facilitate that path in the face of enormous challenges, we need the cooperation and engagement of the Syrian parties and all key players.

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

I now give the floor to Ms. Wosornu.

**Ms. Wosornu:** Today I would like to highlight three key issues: first, the growing humanitarian impact of the hostilities in the region on Syria, including the influx of arrivals from Lebanon — as Special Envoy Pedersen just highlighted; secondly, that this is adding

to an immense and ongoing crisis in Syria; and thirdly, the critical need to ensure sufficient support for both emergency response and early recovery.

For months, we have expressed concern about the dangers posed by the escalating conflict in the Middle East and its impact on the already dire humanitarian situation in Syria. We are now seeing those dangers unfold. Since 23 September, more than 425,000 people have fled Lebanon into Syria. As we just heard, an estimated 72 per cent of those people are Syrians, of whom nearly 60 per cent are children. We join Mr. Pedersen in welcoming that the Government of Syria has kept its borders open for people arriving, which has eased some immigration procedures. Those include the temporary lifting, until the end of October, of the requirement for Syrian nationals to exchange \$100 into the local currency upon arrival; accepting alternative forms of identification in lieu of passports for all nationalities; and allowing safe passage through the country, including to non-Government-controlled areas. We also note that the Government has established hosting centres for Lebanese refugees in 10 governorates, in addition to instructing that the refugees be offered discounted hotel rooms and granting the refugees access to education and health services through national institutions.

As the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Filippo Grandi, noted during his recent visit to Syria, Syrians are returning to their country under the extreme duress of the hostilities in Lebanon. It remains imperative that their safety, security and fundamental rights in Syria be ensured, and they must have the freedom to reach their preferred destinations. It is equally vital that humanitarian organizations have unhindered access to those arriving and to all people in need. The United Nations is supporting the work of the Syrian Arab Red Crescent and other partners to provide immediate basic assistance to new arrivals, including water, food, blankets, health assistance and legal support. The response is now shifting to providing assistance to people in the areas where they have settled and to support host families and communities, many of whom are themselves already stretched to their breaking point.

More than 40,000 people have arrived in north-east Syria. The majority are being hosted in local communities, while others have requested assistance at existing camps. Our humanitarian partners are assessing the availability of contingency stocks to support them. Similar steps are being taken in north-west Syria, where

around 4,000 people have arrived. Many of them report facing challenging journeys, including difficulties at checkpoints and crossing points inside Syria.

The increased need for assistance has put pressure on an already-stretched humanitarian budget and on budgets across the humanitarian system. In order to scale up the response being led by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the Acting Emergency Relief Coordinator has allocated \$8 million from Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF), including for shelter, food, protection and cash assistance for people at the border crossings and in destinations across the country. Today I can announce that an additional \$4 million in CERF funding will be provided in the light of the growing number of arrivals. The United Nations Syria Humanitarian Fund, managed by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, is also preparing a complementary reserve allocation. However, that will only be enough to meet immediate needs. The United Nations has launched an inter-agency appeal for an additional \$324 million to support up to 480,000 people over the next six months. That is in addition to ongoing activities being carried out in relevant locations under the humanitarian response plan for Syria, which is seeking \$4.1 billion and has to date received 27 per cent of the funding, or \$1.1 billion. I join the Special Envoy in thanking donors for their generosity in funding the humanitarian response in Syria, and I urge further immediate support for the critical activities under those plans.

As the Special Envoy stated, the hostilities in the region have also affected the country more directly. A number of air strikes have hit locations along the Syria-Lebanon border, including attacks in the no-man's-land near the main border crossing on 4 October and as recently as yesterday, on 22 October. The attacks have rendered the road impassable for vehicles, forcing people to cross the border on foot with whatever they could carry, around the craters and through the rubble. Others have had to make longer and more treacherous journeys via alternate crossings. The damage to that main road has also caused significant delays in the transportation of humanitarian assistance to people who need it the most — and need it fast. It has also severed a principal commercial route for the import of key commodities through Lebanon, putting further pressure on the already-high prices for food and other goods.

As the hostilities in Lebanon persist, the risk of further disruptions will only grow. Air strikes have also hit other locations across Syria. Those include three strikes this month in the densely populated Mazzeh neighbourhood of Damascus. Those attacks have claimed the lives of at least nine civilians, including children. That neighbourhood also hosts many of the United Nations offices in Damascus and the Embassies of a number of countries. One of the air strikes landed just 100 metres from a United Nations building.

As members know, those developments are happening against the backdrop of one of the largest humanitarian crises in the world, one in which more than 16.7 million people are in need and more than 7 million are internally displaced. Women and girls continue to bear the brunt of it, a disproportionate burden, including heightened risks of gender-based violence. The war that has created this crisis continues to add to the needs.

Since mid-October, both Idlib and western Aleppo have witnessed an increase in hostilities, including air strikes and continued shelling. Damage to a power station resulted in electricity outages for two water stations serving 30,000 people. Air strikes on 14 October also struck just kilometres from a tent settlement where a United Nations inter-agency team was carrying out food distribution by the World Food Programme. Last week, 12 civilians were killed, including three children under the age of 10, and 40 were injured in Idlib and western Aleppo over a three-day period. Close to 2,000 families have been displaced. All of that, plus the new emergency linked to hostilities in Lebanon, continues to drive huge demand for humanitarian assistance, which is perpetually under-resourced and overstretched. More than three quarters of the way through the year, the humanitarian appeal for Syria, as I mentioned earlier, is barely one quarter funded, with \$1.1 billion of the \$4.1 billion received.

The new influx of displaced people, against the backdrop of the long-term crisis in Syria, only underscores the importance of identifying sustainable solutions for people who have been dependent on humanitarian assistance for years. To that end, the United Nations and its partners have finalized an early recovery strategy for the period 2024 to 2028, which will be launched in the coming weeks. The strategy aims to build support for targeted, area-based and medium-term humanitarian programming as a complement to the shorter-term interventions under the

humanitarian response plan. It focuses on four priority areas — ensuring access to health and nutrition services; enhancing access to quality education; improving the management of water resources and the availability of water, sanitation and hygiene facilities; and expanding sustainable livelihoods. That will be accompanied by efforts to expand access to reliable and affordable electricity, which is fundamental for a range of services and is often in short supply across Syria.

I want to make clear that the expansion of early-recovery projects will be an incremental process and is not an immediate replacement for emergency humanitarian services under the humanitarian response plan. Indeed, the approaches are mutually supportive and are aimed at providing people with comprehensive solutions to this crisis. It is therefore vital that donors provide adequate resources both for the humanitarian appeal and for early recovery under the new strategy.

Unless the escalation in hostilities across the region is restrained, the recent impacts and destabilization we have seen in Syria could be just the start of much worse to come. Syrians have been suffering for far too long. Alongside de-escalation in the region, efforts for peace and stability in Syria are as urgent now as they have ever been. We urge the parties to the conflict to commit fully to making progress in the process being facilitated by Special Envoy Pedersen. Let me end by calling on them to de-escalate, respect international humanitarian law, protect civilians and do their utmost to ensure that humanitarian assistance can reach all those in need, wherever they are in Syria.

**The President** (*spoke in French*): I thank Ms. Wosornu for her briefing.

I now give the floor to Ms. Haj Ibrahim.

**Ms. Haj Ibrahim** (*spoke in Arabic*): I thank you, Madam President, for inviting me to deliver my statement at the Security Council and for the Council's interest in hearing the views of Syrian civil society.

I come to the Council today from the Levant, a region that has long suffered from armed conflicts, displacement and destruction. What we are witnessing in our region, including my country, Syria, is not a limited to an escalating conflict that is expanding day by day. It deepens the suffering of innocent civilians and increases waves of migration and forced displacement. As Syrian men and women, we had hoped for an end to this tragedy, and to begin societal reconciliation that leads to comprehensive peace. Unfortunately, that

hope has yet to be realized due to the accumulation of serious international and regional challenges affecting international peace and security. However, the interconnection of those challenges does not allow us to neglect or focus on one without addressing the others. We are all in the same boat, and this is no longer just a romanticized slogan, but a specific and very sensitive reality.

When it comes to Syria, we could say that it is a case of one step forward, two steps back. Despite a general de-escalation and stabilized areas of control, events in the region have reignited a cycle of violence, about which Mr. Pedersen has issued numerous warnings regarding its repercussions on the situation in Syria. That also reflects the entanglement of regional issues and the risk of sliding into new conflicts that would destroy what remains of the Syrian society's resilience and takes it steps back.

I call on the Council to intensify coordinated diplomatic efforts in order to reach a ceasefire through diplomatic solutions in the region. Relying on a single initiative is insufficient. We need multiple effective and coordinated diplomatic initiatives and mediation among members to resolve the escalating conflict that threatens the stability of the region and the world. Members may share our concerns. We therefore need active diplomacy with all the countries in the region and new initiatives towards solutions. That is where our efforts should be focused.

At the beginning of our crisis, many tried to help us to kill each other instead of carrying out dialogue for reconciliation. We needed someone to encourage dialogue, which made communication difficult and widened the rift among our communities. However, there were successful attempts to resolve the conflict, involving diverse segments of society. Today we need to expand the dialogue to address the core issues on which we disagree. There is a genuine desire to work towards community reconciliation as a step towards positive peace. That reconciliation should reach as many communities in Syria as possible, with a constructive focus on our identities and cultural differences, in a way that would allow us to address our pain and wounds, including through the release of detainees and abductees and revealing the fate of those forcibly disappeared by all parties.

Our Syrian cities, under various authorities, must start serious dialogue to enhance understanding and open up opportunities for peacebuilding. The

responsibility for leading that dialogue lies with civil society, and those efforts must be supported by Council members. Effective dialogue is also essential at the diplomatic level, while local dialogue can guide us towards the desired solutions.

Projects related to livelihoods in Syria will not succeed without initiating serious dialogue about the economic blockade and financial over-compliance. That situation increases the likelihood of new conflicts over increasingly scarce resources in my country, exacerbating the economic and social situation. Addressing the economic blockade and easing over-compliance is a crucial step in supporting projects that improve livelihoods and restore dignity to Syrian men and women. Let us build our hospitals, schools and universities to offer our children and youth opportunities better than violence and migration.

I stress the need to expand consultations and to coordinate with women peacebuilders in Syria and across the region. Women, with their experiences and creative vision, are the most capable of offering initiatives that help end violent conflicts and achieve sustainable peace. Genuine equitable partnerships can also be built in a global system that includes civil society, Governments, the United Nations and local and international stakeholders. Each of them has a potential to contribute.

When I was a little girl, I often saw images of the Council on television, and I used to wonder about its role and why members sat in an open circle. I would ask my father for the reason, but I did not understand it at the time. Years later, I found myself inside that very circle. I realize today that it represents more than just a shape; it symbolizes a clear path away from war, breaking the cycle of violence. I would ask Council members to use it to its full potential to lead us towards peace by raising their hands for progress and dignity.

I share this memory with the Council because I truly believe that it still has the power to be a force for peace. The decisions that Council members make here have the potential to pave the way towards a ceasefire and to adopt diplomacy as a force to find solutions. I urge members to always remember the innocent lives, especially of women and children, who are at the core of conflicts and can be saved. My plea today is simple, namely, let us put an end to violence; let us undertake a thorough dialogue about the sanctions, which are stifling our ambitions and future; let us invest in diplomacy at every level, from local dialogues

to international negotiations; and most important, let us ensure that the Security Council lives up to its responsibility as a guardian of peace, bringing hope, reassurance and dignity to all.

**The President** (*spoke in French*): I thank Ms. Haj Ibrahim for her briefing.

I now give the floor to Ms. Jarbawi.

**Ms. Jarbawi:** In September 2023 I addressed the Security Council (see S/PV.9426) and warned that the humanitarian situation inside Syria continued to plunge to unfathomable depths. Another year has passed, and the devastating truth is that we have yet to reach bottom. Much of what I warned of in this Chamber a year ago still holds true. Last year, we warned that, without concerted action to address the drivers of crisis, even more Syrians would be pulled into poverty and despair. Today, as Council members already heard from the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the number of people in need of humanitarian assistance has risen to unprecedented levels. Last year, we warned that, with an economy in freefall, many of those whom we serve were having to make impossible choices, such as whether to eat or send their children to school. Today we are seeing cases of children suffering from acute malnutrition increasing at alarming rates, which was unheard of in Syria before the conflict began. Malnutrition now threatens the long-term development of the thousands who have survived. Last year, we warned how a substantial funding gap was forcing humanitarian organizations to make difficult decisions about which vulnerable families to serve. Today we have a humanitarian system that is simply incapable of keeping pace, while at the same time Syrians continue to call out for tangible support in order to become genuinely self-reliant.

I join the Council tonight from Amman, having just returned this morning from visiting the International Rescue Committee team and partners in Idlib, in north-west Syria. While there, I heard first-hand how Syrian civilians continue to suffer the effect of perpetual conflict. As we already heard, in the past month alone, we witnessed a significant escalation of violence in areas in which we work. Air strikes, shelling and drone attacks have caused the death and injury of scores of civilians and, yet again, the displacement of thousands of people in search of safety. Just last week, air strikes damaged residential areas, agricultural lands and, as noted by other speakers, a power station affecting

the water station that services 30,000 people across 17 villages.

With perpetual conflict comes perpetual uncertainty. The Syrians to whom I spoke in Idlib explained to me how they are living in a constant state of limbo. When they wake, they do not know if today will be the day that they are able to plough their fields or a day when they have to flee attacks once again. It had been 10 years since I was last in Idlib, and I think that what struck me most is just how normalized negative coping mechanisms have become. Parents no longer recognize or realize that they are eating one meal a day instead of three. The reality is that Syrian families now find themselves suspended between their ability to survive daily challenges and their ability to recover and rebuild, stripping away their basic dignity of being able to make choices — good choices regarding their lives and futures. I asked a Syrian displaced who had been displaced from Deir ez-Zor a decade ago if he was optimistic about a political solution to the crisis, and he answered before I even got to finish the question: “Absolutely not”. He told me that, “we lost faith and confidence a long time ago”.

The failure to bring about any meaningful progress towards a political solution has stifled any meaningful effort to address the drivers of humanitarian needs. As a result of the failure, we have no choice but to change the paradigm of how we collectively respond in Syria. While many Syrians have given up on the international community to facilitate political solutions, they have not given up on maintaining their social fabric in support of each other. For too long, we have been focused on providing the band-aid, when in fact Syrians consistently tell us that what they really need are collective efforts to support their recovery. One Syrian woman to whom I spoke this week summed it up better than I could:

“We want to take care of ourselves, and we need a different kind of assistance to get there, one that rests on cooperation among all of us”.

As we think about the need for greater investment in recovery, it is important to note that what is happening today in Syria is not happening in a vacuum. It has truly been a devastating year for many of us in the Middle East region. We continue to watch the catastrophic horrors and the impact of death and destruction in the occupied Palestinian territory, and now in Lebanon. The escalation of the conflict in Lebanon has led to the mass forced displacement of more than 425,000



Lebanese and Syrians into Syria, with those crossing the border fleeing one crisis only to find themselves in another. That movement is occurring at the same time as some international actors are increasingly looking to promote the prospect of large-scale returns to Syria.

It is crucial that we recognize this latest wave of displacement for what it is. It is not a safe, voluntary, sustainable or dignified choice, but once again a false choice — a choice between being caught up either in an active conflict zone or in a perpetual conflict now 14 years in the making. Unless there is genuine movement on the political file, then both tangible improvements to the humanitarian situation as well as the conditions needed for large scale voluntary returns in safety and dignity will continue to elude us all. It is not lost on me, as I am sure it is not on everyone here, that 12 months ago I sat here and delivered a very similar message. I hope that, if I am offered the opportunity to brief the Council again in the future, we will have finally passed the nadir and will be able to look together towards serious recovery. Abir said it better than I can.

I conclude today by urging all of us not to forget those in need in Syria and once again emphasize the responsibilities of the Council to protect all Syrians wherever they are.

**The President** (*spoke in French*): I thank Ms. Jarbawi for her briefing.

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

**Mr. Wood** (United States of America): I thank Special Envoy Pedersen, Director Wosornu and the civil society support representatives for their briefings. At the outset, I want to say to our civil society representatives how important it is that the Security Council regularly hear their perspectives and learn about their efforts.

The United States is deeply concerned about Syrian refugees in Lebanon and Lebanese civilians who have been displaced by the current conflict there. They are faced with the impossible choice of fleeing within Lebanon or crossing Lebanon's borders to insecurity in Syria. We are working to help the most vulnerable refugees, internally displaced persons and host communities as they respond to the crisis. On 26 September, the United States announced nearly \$534 million in additional humanitarian assistance for the Syrian people, including assistance provided through international organization partners. The United States continues to uphold its commitment to

the Syrian people as well as displaced Lebanese, and we urge other donors to join us in stepping up to fill the significant funding gaps so that partners can continue to meet the needs of the most vulnerable.

The regime and all parties in Syria must allow immediate and unhindered humanitarian access across all areas of Syria for as long as needs persist. We take note of recent improvements in the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) access to returnees, both at the border and in their areas of return. We also note the Syrian regime's decision to temporarily suspend exploitative fees for Syrians returning to their country. Those steps are positive, but long overdue, and much more work remains to be done. We therefore continue to support UNHCR's efforts to improve the protection environment in Syria. In that context, we are very concerned about continued reports of abuses against returnees, including the regime arbitrarily detaining returnees. Returns will never be truly voluntary, safe, dignified or sustainable until the regime changes its ways and upholds human rights and fundamental freedoms for all.

We also note with alarm the recent escalation in regime and Russian attacks on north-west Syria, which have caused scores of deaths and injuries. Russian and regime strikes also damaged critical civilian infrastructure, including a key power plant, leaving dozens of communities without drinking water. Under the pretence of fighting terrorism in north-west Syria, the regime and Russia are carrying out brutal attacks on civilians that have left Syrian families homeless, deprived of food and water and brutally maimed or killed. Such horrors repeat themselves in Al-Assad's Syria week in and week out.

Turning to the political process, we continue to support Special Envoy Pedersen's efforts and call on the regime to commit to a meeting of the Constitutional Committee regardless of the location. We expect to hear the same old empty rhetoric from the regime here today. It will rehash the same tired arguments, blaming sanctions and the West for all its problems. But in fact, it is the regime's deep fear of serious dialogue that has ground the Constitutional Committee to a halt. And it is the regime's own corruption, kleptocracy and wanton violence that has driven Syrians into poverty. The regime could alleviate the suffering of its people simply by coming to the negotiating table in good faith — an easy step that it refuses to take. While the Al-Assad regime refuses to engage in a political

process, ordinary Syrians continue to suffer. The only way to end their suffering remains a political solution in line with resolution 2254 (2015).

To conclude, I reiterate the call for the immediate release of Austin Tice. Twelve terrible years have passed since he was abducted in Syria and held by the Syrian regime. The United States has repeatedly pressed Damascus to work with us so that we can, at last, bring Austin home.

**Mr. Nebenzia** (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We thank the Special Envoy for Syria, Mr. Geir Pedersen, and the Director of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), Ms. Edem Wosornu, for their reports on the situation in Syria. We listened carefully to the representatives of civil society.

We trust that the Special Envoy will continue with his efforts to rekindle the inter-Syrian dialogue in line with resolution 2254 (2015), and we continue to await news from him about an agreement on the next meeting of the Constitutional Committee at a venue that would be agreeable to all Syrians, and we believe that it is within his power to do so.

I do not think that anyone will object to the observation that the number of factors threatening the stability of Syria has increased considerably recently. That situation is not attributable to the actions of the legitimate Syrian authorities or their miscalculations, which is how our Western colleagues are trying to portray it. The point is that, despite the highly charged atmosphere in the region and the real possibility of Syria being drawn by Israel into a full-fledged military clash, Washington and its satellites are pursuing their destructive and inhumane policy towards Damascus. That policy has not changed even with the sharp uptick in the number of refugees fleeing Israel Defense Forces military action in Lebanon — a fact, which, in itself, is creating immense challenges for neighbours.

According to the data we heard today, in recent weeks, more than 400,000 Lebanese and Syrians entered the Syrian Arab Republic — approximately 60 per cent of them are children, 1,500 are people with disabilities and more than 3,000 of them are pregnant women. All of them are arriving in Syria in great physical and emotional distress and in need of urgent assistance. We note that, even in the face of the harshest unilateral coercive measures by the United States and the European Union — measures that inflict

daily collective punishment on ordinary Syrians — the Syrian Government and local communities give the shirt off their backs are doing their utmost to meet the basic needs of new arrivals.

According to our information in the areas bordering Lebanon, 20 temporary shelters have been set up, and people are also being housed in hotels, mostly free of charge, and in private houses. Efforts are also being made to send children to school. Most displaced people are ending up in Damascus and the surrounding areas. Special Envoy Pedersen and OCHA Director Wosornu mentioned those facts today, and we are grateful to them for doing so. But we are most astonished that no mention is even made of them in United Nations documents, and neither is it mentioned that the Syrian authorities are meeting international organizations' and refugees' every need. They are providing streamlined procedures for entry into the country and helping the United Nations and non-governmental organizations to work unhindered at border crossings and to provide food to the needy. The United Nations must give an objective assessment of the efforts that are being made by the Syrian authorities. It is time to stop playing along with Western countries, which for seven consecutive years have prevented the Secretary-General from publicly distancing himself from the internal Secretariat document, published in 2017, and entitled "Parameters and Principles of United Nations Assistance in Syria", which is in keeping with Western donors' anti-Damascus policy and runs counter to the Charter of the United Nations and General Assembly resolution 46/182, on humanitarian activities. I will not even mention the so-called friends of Syria — the Western countries sitting here in this Chamber. They prefer to talk about the horrors that, in their view, Syrians returning from Lebanon will have to face. The Secretary-General and the staff now need to be more decisive and assertive and insist that donors stop politicizing aid to Syrians.

Incidentally, it has come to our attention that United Nations agencies are currently working on something that is referred to as the "early-recovery plan for Syria", and we would like to know beforehand of what the plan consists of. I think that Damascus would feel the same. We insist that the first point of that plan entail a rejection of all politically motivated preconditions for launching development projects in that country.

Irrespective of whether the United Nations leadership will muster enough courage to honestly

discharge its duty to Syria and prevent the politicization of humanitarian efforts in support of its people, we are nonetheless convinced that humanitarian bodies are under an obligation to show solidarity and to help the Syrian authorities to host refugees and to provide them with food, health care and housing; otherwise, all the eloquent statements and appeals to humanity and solidarity are simply worthless. In that connection, we welcome efforts that countries that are not indifferent have made to collect and send assistance to those in need. Iran and Pakistan, for example, have sent humanitarian supplies. The Centre for the Reconciliation of Opposing Sides of the Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation has distributed food packages. In addition, on 13 October, a charter from Moscow arrived in Damascus with food and medical equipment collected by the Syrian diaspora in Venezuela.

We see that the spiral of violence in the Middle East, which is escalating by the day, is exacerbating the situation in Syria, entailing the risk of it being drawn into the widening confrontation. Against a backdrop of aerial bombardments and the Israel Defense Forces ground invasion of Lebanon, the number of indiscriminate Israeli air strikes on Syrian territory, including on Damascus and Latakia, is steadily rising. According to the Syrian centre for monitoring human rights, since the beginning of 2024, 119 attacks were carried out, 97 of which deployed aircraft and 22 artillery. Almost every day those, attacks result in the deaths of civilians. Just before today's briefing, two people were killed by yet another strike on the neighbourhood of Mazzeh in the capital. Such acts, which are in violation of the sovereignty of Syria and other neighbouring Arab countries, in addition to the lack of any proper response from the leadership of the United Nations, leave us deeply disappointed.

Against that backdrop, one of the key destabilizing factors on the ground has been — and remains — the illegal military presence of the United States to the east of the Euphrates River and around the town of Al-Tanf, in the south-east of the Syrian Arab Republic. Militants from various terrorist groups, including Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant terrorists, are actively recruiting and training in those areas, and as is now known for a fact, representatives of the Kyiv regime are actively cooperating with them. Ukrainian emissaries in particular are very closely cooperating with the fighters from the Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham group who have settled in Idlib and are exchanging their terrorist skills with them. The United States and its allies pretend not

to notice that, even though they are internationally designated terrorists.

Such flirting with terrorists by our Western colleagues in the Council, as well as their attempts to use them for their own geopolitical purposes, is something that deserves the strongest condemnation. However, Washington continues to occupy vast areas in north-eastern Syria and to openly steal the country's rich oil, gas and agricultural resources. It is also triggering a further deterioration of the socioeconomic situation in the country and is trying to revitalize the extremist underground in Syria. In that regard, we reiterate that we stand in solidarity with the Syrian authorities' legitimate demands for the withdrawal of all military contingents that are unlawfully present in the country violating its sovereignty and territorial integrity and for the immediate cessation of air strikes against the country, which flagrantly breach international law.

We also call on the leadership of United Nations specialized agencies to work in a coordinated manner to mobilize funding for Syria, at least within the parameters that have already been pledged to Syria by the Governments of various countries. As of today, the United Nations humanitarian appeal for Syria is only 27 per cent funded, which is unacceptably low for a country facing such challenges. Syria has huge potential, and if that potential is not impeded and its resources are not plundered, the country will be able to stand firmly on its own two feet. In particular, it is encouraging that Syria has been able to retain its very high human potential, even after 13 years of severe hardships and unscrupulous efforts to undermine its sovereignty and statehood. It is no coincidence that the University of Damascus was recently included in the international ranking of the best universities in the world. We call on all those who seek to truly uphold universal humanitarian principles, rather than using them as a cover for their geopolitical games, to lend a helping hand to the Syrians in their hour of need and to contribute to the country's future.

**Mr. Bendjama** (Algeria): I have the honour to deliver this statement on behalf of the African members of the Security Council plus one (A3+), namely, Guyana, Mozambique, Sierra Leone and my own country, Algeria.

At the outset, the members of the A3+ would like to thank Mr. Pedersen and Ms. Wosornu for their valuable briefings. We also listened carefully to the representatives of civil society. The A3+ welcomes the participation

of our colleagues from Syria, Iran and Türkiye in this meeting. I wish to express, through the Permanent Representative of Türkiye, our heartfelt condolences to the families of the victims of the horrific terrorist attacks carried out today in Ankara. Our thoughts are with the people of Türkiye at this difficult time, and we stand in solidarity with them as they face this tragedy.

We meet today as the situation in the Middle East continues to worsen, with the path to a viable solution becoming increasingly elusive and complex. The suffering of the Syrian people has persisted for far too long, and it is imperative that we work seriously towards its resolution. The fighting in Gaza and Lebanon, alongside rising instability in the Syrian Golan, are profoundly affecting Syria. The A3+ is gravely concerned that the already fragile security and humanitarian situation could easily plunge Syria back into a cycle of violence — an outcome that we are all seeking to avoid. In that regard, we note the Syrian letter dated 14 October, reporting that

“an Israeli air strike from the direction of northern Lebanon hit the Homs countryside industrial zone, causing significant material damage to public and private property”.

The A3+ expresses deep concern about reports of demining activities within the area of operations of the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) and condemns all violations of Syria’s sovereignty. We reiterate our call for de-escalation and a nationwide ceasefire, as well as a regional ceasefire, in particular in Gaza and Lebanon. We call for maximum restraint from all actors in the region and for Syrians to be spared from further military confrontation. The recent incidents reported over the past few weeks, coupled with the re-emergence of the terrorist threat in Syria, remind us all of the urgent need for a political solution to the crisis — one that safeguards Syria’s unity, sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity. We must ensure the continued protection of UNDOF’s presence on the Golan and uphold the 1974 Agreement on Disengagement between Israeli and Syrian Forces, which has been a cornerstone of regional stability for decades.

The A3+ reaffirms its support for a Syrian-owned and Syrian-led political process, which is the only pathway to a solution, as laid out in resolution 2254 (2015). In that regard, we emphasize the urgency of convening the Constitutional Committee. In that context, we renew our support for the Special Envoy in

his endeavours and call on all stakeholders to engage constructively with him to break the current deadlock in the political process. The A3+ believes that, through inclusive dialogue among Syrians and with the backing of the international community, a sustainable solution can be achieved.

The briefings by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs have consistently highlighted the alarming humanitarian situation in Syria. The humanitarian response plan is only 27 per cent funded, while 70 per cent of the population is in need of humanitarian assistance. That dire situation has been exacerbated by the recent influx of Syrians returning to their country. According to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, more than 400,000 people have fled the violence in Lebanon and crossed back into Syria. Addressing that emergency will require tremendous effort and support from the international community in order to mobilize significant resources. Syria was not prepared for this crisis and will not be able to manage it alone. The A3+ calls on all donors to assist Syria and the humanitarian community in supporting Syrian returnees and Lebanese refugees.

We also express grave concern about the impact of the humanitarian crisis on children, particularly on their education and mental health, with one third of children reported to be suffering from psychosocial distress. Rehabilitating Syria’s health system is crucial. The A3+ looks forward to the launch of the early recovery strategy and welcomes the focus on health and nutrition services within that framework.

While the international community must not lose sight of the ongoing humanitarian emergency, the A3+ believes that a development approach is equally necessary. Syria cannot rely on humanitarian aid indefinitely; it must be empowered to face its socioeconomic challenges, including through the lifting of unilateral sanctions.

In conclusion, the A3+ firmly believes that the solution to Syria’s crisis can only be political and must be decided by the Syrian people themselves. The international community, and this very Council, must help Syrians find a resolution to a conflict that has plagued their country for more than 13 years.

**Mrs. Blokar Drobič** (Slovenia): I thank Special Envoy Pedersen and Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs Director Wosornu for their

briefings, as well as Ms. Haj Ibrahim and Ms. Jarbawi for their valuable contributions.

Against the backdrop of escalating tensions that are engulfing the wider Middle East, progress on a political solution in Syria and beyond is urgently needed. In addition to intensified hostilities in parts of Syria, we are witnessing the spillover effects of regional escalations, in particular the war in Gaza and the ongoing hostilities in Lebanon. As we heard today from the Special Envoy, they both have a direct impact on Syria. The situation is not sustainable, and the need for maximum restraint and calm is critical.

Slovenia reiterates its urgent call for an immediate end to the hostilities in Lebanon, a ceasefire in Gaza and a de-escalation across the region, including in Syria, in line with resolution 2254 (2015), while working towards a nationwide ceasefire.

The implications of regional tensions for Syria and Syrians are alarming. Tens of thousands of Syrians, many of whom have been displaced multiple times, are once again fleeing for their lives. On the other hand, hundreds of thousands of children, women and men are crossing into Syria on foot, gripped by overwhelming fear and anguish. They urgently require humanitarian assistance. Reports indicate that at least 60 per cent of those crossing are under the age of 18. Among them are Syrians who had already fled to Lebanon because of the conflict in their homeland. Now they face a situation of terror and destitution, forced to relive the nightmare and uncertainty of displacement yet again. We should be under no illusion that Syrians are making voluntary and informed decisions to return to Syria.

Slovenia is particularly concerned about the reports that a number of Syrians who crossed from Lebanon into Syria to flee the war were arrested upon their arrival. Syria already has one of the highest numbers of detained, abducted and missing persons in the world. It is a clear humanitarian imperative that the fate and whereabouts of missing persons in Syria be clarified.

The current displacement crisis adds an additional burden on Syria and its local responders, who are still in the midst of a widespread humanitarian crisis, with almost 17 million people in need of humanitarian assistance throughout the country — the highest in over a decade of conflict that severely damaged basic civilian infrastructure. Slovenia also reiterates that Syria needs sustainable, predictable and efficient aid flows — including cross-border and cross-line

aid — across the entire country for as long as needed. Humanitarian actors need greater predictability to plan their activities, and they must be able to conduct their work safely. That can be done only if all parties comply with international humanitarian law.

In conclusion, as the situation is becoming more dangerous and unpredictable with each passing day, we reiterate our full support for the Special Envoy's efforts, and we call on all parties to cooperate substantively and fully towards delivering a lasting political settlement in Syria. Peace is definitely worth more than any political or military victory. The people of Syria need and deserve peace after enduring more than a decade of war. Peace will be sustainable only if it is inclusive and just. It is therefore worth repeating that accountability and justice for victims are a *sine qua non* towards achieving that goal. Everyone responsible for breaches of international humanitarian law and violations and abuses of human rights must be held accountable.

**Mr. Yamazaki (Japan):** I thank Special Envoy Pedersen and Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs Director Wosornu for their informative briefings. I also thank Ms. Abir Haj Ibrahim and Ms. Su'ad Jarbawi for their briefings.

The rapid escalation of hostilities in Lebanon between Israel and Hizbullah over the past month has taken a toll on Syria. More than 425,000 people, both Syrian and Lebanese, have fled across the border. That has created enormous humanitarian needs and caused an already precarious security situation to deteriorate even further. The international community must act to halt the expansion of the crisis destabilizing the Middle East. In order to prevent further escalation of the conflict in Lebanon, Japan strongly urges the parties to exercise maximum restraint and to make sincere efforts towards a diplomatic settlement.

Regarding the political track in Syria, Japan reaffirms its support to Special Envoy Pedersen and his engagement with all stakeholders. We also note his meeting in late September with Syria's new Foreign Minister, Bassam Al-Sabbagh. The international community needs to continue backing the Syrian-led and Syrian-owned political process established in resolution 2254 (2015) and the extensive facilitation efforts led by the Special Envoy. It is regrettable that the Constitutional Committee has not convened for more than two years. Japan expresses its strong hope that it will do so at the earliest time.

Even before the arrival of people fleeing Lebanon, Syria was facing one of the biggest humanitarian crises in the world. Life for Syrians has seen no significant improvement for years. More than 70 per cent of them are in need, lacking critical infrastructure and suffering from high inflation and a severe economic downturn. Japan emphasizes the necessity of effectively implementing all available modalities to deliver aid. We value the continued efforts to enhance cross-line deliveries. At the same time, smooth cross-border support is crucial to accommodate the needs of the population in north-west Syria.

We stress the importance of supporting the efforts of relevant United Nations agencies under the coordination of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. It is worrisome that the humanitarian response plan for Syria is still significantly underfunded, with a greater funding shortfall than at this time last year. Since 2012, Japan has provided emergency and humanitarian aid through United Nations and other agencies in the amount of \$35 billion. We encourage donors to provide whatever assistance they can to address the urgent needs of the population. In addition, it is essential to invest in early recovery and resilience to help establish a strong foundation for a stable and safer Syria.

Japan is committed, both through humanitarian aid and political engagement, to support the people of Syria and their aspirations for a better future.

**Mr. De La Gasca** (Ecuador) (*spoke in Spanish*): I am grateful for the information provided by Mr. Geir Pedersen, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria; Ms. Edem Wosornu, Director of the Operations and Advocacy Division of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs; and the civil society representatives. I also welcome the presence of the Permanent Representatives of Syria, Iran and Türkiye.

Ecuador acknowledges the efforts of the Special Envoy to build confidence and renew the political will of the stakeholders in order to reactivate a pluralistic and substantive dialogue in accordance with resolution 2254 (2015).

The escalation of violence and instability in the region has a direct impact on security in Syria and constitutes a threat to peace and security in the region. It is urgent to implement coordinated diplomatic action to achieve an immediate cessation of hostilities in

Lebanon and Gaza, as well as to curb the spread of terrorism and violent extremism on Syrian territory. My delegation joins the international community's call for restraint and moderation. Diplomacy for peace and genuine concern for the effects of violence on the civilian population must prevail.

The initiative of the Humanitarian Task Force on Syria to hold an emergency meeting to assess alternatives to alleviate the deteriorating humanitarian situation is commendable. The region is witnessing one of the most acute displacement crises in recent years. Civilians in Lebanon and Syria, many of them women and children, have been forcibly displaced by the conflict. Mobilizing funds to meet the humanitarian needs of displaced persons in transit and in shelters is vital to address the specific needs of unaccompanied minors and reduce their vulnerability to other forms of violence, such as sexual and gender-based violence, and trafficking for exploitation, among other things.

My delegation encourages Special Envoy Pedersen to explore any alternative that can help overcome the impasse in the political negotiations and re-establish meetings of the Constitutional Committee, while taking into consideration the meaningful and safe participation of women. Further prolonging the delay in those talks serves only to promote an atmosphere of hopelessness and abandonment.

I would like to conclude by reaffirming that the only way out of the crisis in Syria is via a political solution. No effort must be spared in order to bring relief to the civilian population and make way for peace and national reconciliation.

**Dame Barbara Woodward** (United Kingdom): I thank Special Envoy Pedersen and Director Wosornu for their briefings. I would also like to thank Ms. Haj Ibrahim and Ms. Jarbawi for their invaluable insights on the humanitarian and political situation in Syria.

I would like to make three points today.

First, the conflict in Lebanon has had a devastating impact on civilians, including Syrians who had sought refuge from the Al-Assad regime in Lebanon. Hundreds of thousands of Syrian, Lebanese and Palestinian people are now fleeing into Syria, where, tragically, they will face further conflict. However, let me be clear: that movement of people does not mean that Al-Assad has met the conditions to facilitate the safe return of Syrians — something we and the international community have long called for. Syria remains unsafe

for voluntary, safe and dignified returns. Sadly, those fleeing are motivated by desperation, and not the promise of a safe home. We urge the Syrian authorities to protect the rights and safety of those displaced civilians. While the increased monitoring capacity of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees on the border is welcome, it is essential that the United Nations have full access to continue that monitoring across the country.

Secondly, as we heard from our briefers, the humanitarian situation in Syria, with a record 16.7 million people in need, threatens to deteriorate even further with dwindling resources. We cannot allow essential services to collapse. A coordinated response across Syria, building on existing humanitarian structures, is urgently needed to respond to those needs. For our part, the United Kingdom has mobilized programming and funding in response to the displacement crisis in Syria, committing over \$3.8 million. As needs continue to grow, it is essential that humanitarian organizations can deliver life-saving assistance free from interference or restriction.

Thirdly, we are concerned by the increased violence and civilian casualties across Syria in recent weeks. That includes in north-west Syria, where attacks by the Al-Assad regime and its Russian backer have displaced thousands of Syrians and resulted in civilian casualties. Air strikes have been conducted near displacement camps, halting schools and health services and impacting water distribution facilities — all of that in a region where humanitarian need is already staggering.

The escalation across the region is a sobering reminder of the devastating price that civilians pay for ongoing conflict and violence. The solution in Syria is clear, and I reiterate our call for the Al-Assad regime and all parties to Syria's conflict to engage meaningfully in the political process in line with resolution 2254 (2015).

**Mr. Camilleri** (Malta): I thank Special Envoy Pedersen and Director Wosornu for their briefings. I also thank Ms. Haj Ibrahim and Ms. Jarbawi for sharing their experiences with us today.

The consequences of the ongoing instability in the region, most vividly the Israel-Hamas war in Gaza, and the ongoing military operations in Lebanon are evident. In the past week, we have witnessed air strikes targeting Damascus and Latakia. Bombardment in the north-west of Syria by Russian aircraft and shelling by the Syrian army has resulted in civilian casualties, damage

to schools and the forced displacement of hundreds of families. Israeli air strikes in Lebanon have displaced nearly 300,000 people, forcing both Syrian refugees and Lebanese civilians to seek shelter in a war-torn Syria. Civilians are already paying the highest price. An immediate and unconditional ceasefire in Gaza and Lebanon is urgent, including to prevent a catastrophe that would engulf the entire region.

Before those recent escalations, the humanitarian toll of the crisis in Syria was already staggering. More than 70 per cent of Syria's population is in desperate need of assistance. The malnutrition crisis has tripled in five years, the cost of living has doubled and 3.1 million people now face acute food insecurity. Those are not just numbers; they reflect the daily suffering of millions. Malta commends the tireless work of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and its humanitarian partners who, against all odds, are reaching more than 4 million Syrians each month. The United Nations and its partners are a critical lifeline to the most vulnerable across the country. We are also heartened by the United Nations vaccination catch-up campaign and the scaling-up of winterization efforts, both of which will provide much-needed relief in the coming months.

Unhindered humanitarian access remains essential. The most direct routes for cross-border and cross-line assistance must remain open. As long as the humanitarian needs persist, the access routes must remain open, ensuring that help reaches all those in need. Yet we cannot ignore the larger humanitarian gap in Syria. The lack of adequate resources, not only for emergency assistance but also for early recovery, livelihoods and resilience-building, remains a significant concern.

The Council has a clear mandate and responsibility. We must ensure the full implementation of resolution 2254 (2015). The ill-fated obstructions by all the parties to the conflict in Syria must end now. Damascus and the Syrian opposition must act and engage now. A nationwide ceasefire remains the immediate necessity. All parties must commit to moving forward with the resumed Constitutional Committee and engage earnestly with the good offices of the Special Envoy. Only through genuine dialogue can we begin to build the just and lasting peace the country deserves. In that regard, Malta reaffirms its support for the Independent Institution on Missing Persons in Syria and emphasizes

the importance of carrying out its mandate in a gender-responsive and survivor-centred manner.

After 14 years of war, Syria's future hangs by a thread. Its economy, security and society are in ruins, and millions have fled, fearful to return. The current wars unfolding across the Middle East threaten to tip Syria into total collapse. The responsibility falls on the Council and those with influence over the parties to ensure that the civilians of Syria are protected from the devastating consequences of an all-out regional war.

**Mr. De Rivièrè** (France) (*spoke in French*): I would like to thank Mr. Pedersen and Ms. Wosornu for their briefings, as well as Ms. Haj Ibrahim and Ms. Jarbawi for sharing their experiences. I also extend my condolences to the Permanent Representative of Türkiye in the light of the terrorist attack in Ankara today.

There is a risk that the crises in Gaza and Lebanon could engulf the entire region and spread into Syria. That must be prevented at all costs. All the actors involved must show restraint and work towards de-escalation. The civilian population would be the first to suffer the opening of a new front in the conflict. Those regional tensions only add to the ongoing hostilities in Syria, which is also dealing with a resurgence in Da'esh activity, the growing trafficking of Captagon and the continued violence of the Syrian regime and its supporters against the Syrian people. Russia's bombardment of Idlib from 14 to 16 October, which killed 10 people, is one example of that.

At this time of acute crisis in the Middle East, the much-needed launching of a credible political process that fulfils the aspirations of the Syrian people remains the only way to achieve a just and lasting peace. We are ready, subject to tangible and verifiable progress in the political process, to begin lifting sanctions and to consider financing reconstruction. For the time being, we reiterate our confidence in Mr. Pedersen to implement all aspects of resolution 2254 (2015).

More than 400,000 Syrians and Lebanese have fled Israeli military operations in Lebanon to Syria. We must help them, as well as the displaced persons in Lebanon and the Syrian refugees who are still there. We must continue to put pressure on the Syrian regime to remove the security and political obstacles impeding the return of refugees. France has been working to achieve that end together with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and our partners.

The humanitarian situation continues to deteriorate throughout Syria, with 70 per cent of the population in emergency situations. The continuing hostilities and risk of escalation in the region only heighten the humanitarian needs against the backdrop of the lack of funding. We are concerned about the long-term consequences of 13 years of conflict on the civilian population, particularly children, who are affected by malnutrition and psychological distress. We call on all States to take action to respond to this emergency.

France recalls that international humanitarian law is binding on all actors, everywhere in Syria. We reiterate the vital importance of cross-border humanitarian aid deliveries, which enable us to bring aid to 2.4 million people, particularly in the north-west. The efforts to deliver aid across the front lines must continue. We call on the Syrian regime to extend indefinitely access to the Bab-Al-Hawa, Bab-Al-Salam and Al-Rai crossings, which expires on 13 November.

**Mr. Geng Shuang** (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I thank Special Envoy Pedersen and Director Wosornu for their briefings. I also listened carefully to the statements made by the two representatives of civil society. I would like to make three points.

First, with the conflict in Gaza being protracted and the situation between Lebanon and Israel deteriorating, the international community must work together to prevent the conflict from spreading to Syria. China strongly condemns Israel's frequent air strikes in Syria and calls on Israel to immediately stop those attacks. We call on all the parties concerned to respect in earnest Syria's sovereignty, security and territorial integrity and to make concrete efforts to maintain stability in the countries in the region, Syria included. Foreign forces must end their illegal military presence in Syria.

Secondly, it is reported that Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham, Da'esh and other terrorist forces have recently intensified their activities in Syria. China is gravely concerned about that. China firmly supports the Syrian Government in taking the necessary counter-terrorism measures. We call on the international community to abide by international law and the Council's resolutions, to adopt unified standards, to work together with a zero-tolerance approach to combating terrorist forces in Syria and to prevent the latter from exploiting the current situation and adding more destabilizing factors to an already volatile situation.



Thirdly, as a result of the recent situation between Lebanon and Israel, there has been a massive inflow of refugees into Syria. China commends the Syrian Government for its positive actions to host the refugees. We welcome the issuance by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees of an emergency humanitarian appeal and hope to see synergy from the international community in jointly addressing the situation. I want to stress that improving Syria's economic and social resilience would fundamentally help to improve the country's humanitarian situation. We look forward to the upcoming launch of the United Nations early recovery strategy for Syria, with a view to supporting early-recovery projects across the country. Unilateral sanctions gravely impede the efforts to improve the humanitarian situation in Syria and should be lifted immediately.

In conclusion, I would like to reiterate that a political settlement is the only path for resolving the question of Syria. China welcomes the dialogue and consultations among all parties in Syria to enhance mutual trust. We support Special Envoy Pedersen's continued to work with all the parties under the Syrian-led and Syrian-owned principle. We hope that the existing dialogue mechanisms will complement each other and, based on full communication and consultation with the Syrian Government, form synergies and facilitate a political settlement.

**Mr. Sangjin Kim** (Republic of Korea): I would like to thank Special Envoy Pedersen and Director Wosornu for their briefings today. My delegation would also like to commend the noble efforts the civil society has been making to bring about peace in Syria and the region.

We take this opportunity to express our deepest condolences to the victims and their families affected by the tragic acts of terror in Ankara today. We stand firmly with the people of Türkiye in this time of grief.

Security in Syria is rapidly degrading as regional escalation pulls the country further into the conflict, with sharp increases in air strikes across Syria and hundreds of thousands of Syrian refugees in Lebanon once again fleeing for their lives back into Syria. In that context, I would like to make the following three points.

First, all parties in the region must prioritize de-escalation at all costs. My delegation is gravely concerned about the dramatic rise in air strikes on multiple fronts, including in north-west Syria and areas near Damascus, carried out by regional Powers.

Exploiting the current situation, while seemingly advantageous, will only further destabilize Syria and the wider region, serving no one's long-term interests. Despite the significant challenges, we urge all parties to recommit to the political process under resolution 2254 (2015), which remains the only agreed-upon path forward.

Secondly, the safe, dignified and voluntary return of refugees and internally displaced persons must be ensured at all times. The recent influx of returnees into Syria does not imply that the underlying security and legal challenges preventing their return have been resolved. Rather, it exemplifies how volatile the region has become, as Syria is now seen as less dangerous than neighbouring Lebanon, long a refuge for Syrians. In that regard, we express concern about the Syrian Government's amnesty decree, issued in September 2024. While it allegedly offers "general" amnesty, its limitations leave many returnees vulnerable to legal uncertainties and potential prosecution or conscription. We urge the Syrian authorities to halt any prosecutions or forcible conscription of refugees for any reason. We also note the Syrian Government's eight-point declaration made during the Executive Committee of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in October 2023. Reports indicate that the recent entry process has been facilitated in line with that declaration, allowing refugees to enter the country more easily, which we view as a positive development.

Thirdly, the dire humanitarian situation, exacerbated by the spillover from Lebanon's crisis, demands urgent international attention. Refugee influxes into areas with insufficient aid serve to underscore the need for immediate global action to avoid further catastrophe. As pledged at this year's Brussels Syria Conference in May, the Republic of Korea is committed to addressing the Syrian crisis, providing a total of \$26 million for Syria and its neighbouring countries, including Lebanon. Korea will continue to do its part. We commend the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, UNHCR and their partner organizations in delivering critical assistance to refugees and returnees, particularly at border crossings, shelters and in host communities. Their work is indispensable and, as the crisis continues to deepen, they will require continued support to meet the growing needs on the ground. We call on the Syrian Government to authorize continuous humanitarian access through the Bab Al-Salam and Al-Rai crossings, without expiration dates, as those crossings are crucial

for delivering aid to the most vulnerable and must not be disrupted.

In conclusion, we urge all parties to urgently cease hostilities, prioritize the safety and dignity of refugees and recommit to a political solution that ensures lasting peace in Syria.

**The President** (*spoke in French*): I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of Switzerland.

As my colleagues have done, I would like to thank Special Envoy Geir Pedersen and the Director of the Operations and Advocacy Division at the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, Edem Wosornu, for their briefings and for their strong commitment. I also warmly thank Ms. Abir Haj Ibrahim and Ms. Su'ad Jarbawi for accepting Switzerland's invitation to share their views with the Security Council, which are based on the experience of Syrian civil society since the beginning of the conflict.

In Syria, civil society is making a crucial contribution to the delivery of humanitarian aid and to the quest for lasting peace and reconciliation throughout the country. In that regard, it is important to highlight the role of Syrian women, who remain committed to an inclusive political process led by Syria, under the auspices of the United Nations and its Special Envoy, in accordance with resolution 2254 (2015). On their own initiative or through platforms, such as the Civil Society Support Room and the Women's Consultative Council, under the auspices of the Office of the Special Envoy, Syrian women are working tenaciously to heal the wounds and rebuild the social fabric that a decade of conflict has torn apart. Working to provide answers to the relatives of people who have gone missing as a result of the conflict is an integral part of those efforts. Syrians have the right to know what happened to their missing relatives.

Switzerland therefore encourages civil society, as well as all States concerned, to cooperate with the Independent Institution on Missing Persons, whose mandate is strictly humanitarian. We welcome the forthcoming appointment of someone to head this Geneva-based Institution, and we hope that it will soon be fully operational.

Respect for international law, including international humanitarian law and human rights law, is fundamental if we are to halt the spiral of violence of recent weeks, which is of the utmost concern to us.

Switzerland calls on all actors who have influence on the parties to the conflict to show the utmost restraint and be committed to a ceasefire throughout Syrian territory, in accordance with resolution 2254 (2015). We cannot repeat it often enough: the civilian population and infrastructure must be protected in accordance with international humanitarian law.

We must at all costs prevent the conflict in the Middle East and neighbouring Lebanon from spreading to Syria. To that end, we also stress the importance of an immediate ceasefire in Gaza and Lebanon, given the worrisome signs of escalation in the region, particularly in humanitarian terms. That is particularly the case in Lebanon, where the crisis has already caused more than 425,000 people to flee to Syria in less than a month. The majority of them, mainly women and children, have found refuge with relatives or in host communities. Those people are in a situation of acute vulnerability and have immense and urgent needs. Women, in particular single women, are exposed to an increased risk of gender-based violence. In view of that situation, Switzerland welcomes the swift action taken by the United Nations and international and national non-governmental organizations. We encourage them to continue their sound coordination.

As Ms. Jarbawi pointed out, the massive influx of people from Lebanon is putting a strain on the response to the humanitarian crisis in Syria itself, where more than 16 million people are already in need of assistance. To cope with the scale of the situation, all forms of aid delivery, including cross-border aid and aid delivered across the front lines, remain crucial. Greater predictability is also essential. That will be possible only if funding is adapted to meet needs. That is why, a few days ago, the Swiss Government announced its intention to allocate an additional CHF7 million in humanitarian aid to meet the needs of the population in Lebanon and Syria.

The turmoil in the region must not divert our attention from the situation in Syria. The Council must remain seized of the matter and continue to work tirelessly for a lasting political solution, in accordance with resolution 2254 (2015). Switzerland will remain committed to that end.

I resume my functions as President of the Council.

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

**Mr. Aldahhak** (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): For more than 70 years, our region has suffered from the continued Israeli occupation of Arab territories in Palestine, Syria and Lebanon and from the brutal acts of aggression and systematic crimes that the occupation authorities have continued to commit. Our region is also suffering from the hostile policies pursued by Western countries supporting Israel to the detriment of our countries' security and stability and the lives and well-being of our peoples. We must point out in that regard that a correct diagnosis is the first step to addressing any issue. Of course, an incorrect diagnosis and ignoring the root cause of an issue lead to its aggravation and prolongation and increase the difficulty of resolving it.

The Israeli occupation and the policies of the countries supporting it are the main reasons for instability in our region. More than seven decades of occupation have been met with hundreds of meetings, initiatives, conferences and the adoption of resolutions, all of which have failed to reach the solutions that the region needs, which raises the question: Why? It is because some States represented in the Security Council have been doing their utmost to serve the Israeli occupation and prolong it. They harness their abilities to cover up the occupation authorities' massacres and aggression. They have even been directly involved in targeting countries and peoples who are struggling to liberate their occupied territories and restore their legitimate rights enshrined in international law and resolutions of international legitimacy. They have made efforts to destabilize those countries, undermine their achievements, plunder their wealth and punish their people.

The Israeli occupation continues to commit genocide in Palestine, its wanton aggression against Lebanon and its repeated hysterical attacks against Syria. Each time that the international community believes that it has seen the most extreme level of brutality and barbarism, the occupation authorities go a step further and escalate their barbaric methods, as they are reassured that within the Council a permanent Member State has chosen to stand on the wrong side of history and prevent any meaningful or decisive action to stop the aggression, save lives and alleviate the suffering. The unlimited and multifarious support of the United States Administration has enabled the occupation authorities to escalate their aggression and increase the frequency of their attacks on the territories of my country, Syria. Over the past few days, the attacks have targeted several residential buildings in the capital

of Damascus, claiming the lives of innocent civilians and terrorizing peaceful citizens.

On 21 October, the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Expatriates of the Syrian Arab Republic addressed a letter to the Secretary-General briefing him on the 116 Israeli attacks since 7 October 2023. Those attacks have targeted innocent civilians, including women and children, with the most advanced and lethal types of weapons. They have targeted production and service facilities, infrastructure and even diplomatic headquarters and border crossings that thousands of people use daily on their route from brotherly Lebanon. The assaults have resulted in the martyrdom of more than 100 people. They have led to material losses and extensive damage to private and public properties. My country, Syria, calls upon the Security Council to take immediate action and decisive measures to stop the attacks, hold Israel accountable for them and ensure their non-repetition. We nevertheless stress Syria's right to defend its people and territory by all means provided for by international law.

The Syrian Government continues to do all that it can to welcome the almost 500,000 brotherly Lebanese citizens and returning Syrians from Lebanon. The Government is providing them with all needed services, despite the serious challenges that Syria is facing resulting from terrorism, aggression, the illegal foreign military presence, its plundering of national wealth and the unilateral and coercive measures, which amount to the collective punishment of Syrians.

The Syrian Government has taken all necessary measures to provide humanitarian assistance to all persons taking refuge within its borders, whether they be Lebanese, Syrian or third-country nationals. Such measures include facilitating their entry and establishing humanitarian response centres at border crossings in cooperation with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, other United Nations agencies, the Syrian Arab Red Crescent and Syrian civil society organizations. Furthermore, the Government has provided shelters to host the incoming people, and Syrian citizens have become host to their brethren. Health care, medical services, food baskets, humanitarian aid and transportation, communication and other essential services have also been provided.

Hundreds of thousands of Syrians have returned to their homeland, and the Syrian Government has facilitated their return regardless of the circumstances in which they left or the official documents in their

possession. In cooperation with partners, primarily civil society organizations, the Syrian Government has provided health care and psychosocial support. Free legal services for thousands have also been provided to establish the legal status of returnees, replace lost documents and ensure that information concerning their civil status is properly recorded. Furthermore, fee exemptions have been granted and other services have also been provided.

The fact that the number of Syrians returning to their homeland recently exceeded 300,000 unequivocally proves the false nature of Western claims regarding the issue of return and confirms that the main obstacle limiting return rates is the deteriorating economic and living conditions and the lack of basic services, most notably electricity, as a result of the unilateral coercive measures targeting all Syrians, the politicization of humanitarian work, the withholding of funding, the reluctance to support sustainable solutions and promote early recovery and livelihood projects and the failure to fulfil the commitments that have been made. To date, as we approach the end of the year, the humanitarian response plan is 27 per cent funded. In addition to all those factors, United States occupation forces are plundering Syrian oil, wheat, grain and wealth.

Syria recently welcomed Filippo Grandi, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, who saw first-hand the outstanding efforts made by the Syrian Government to address the worsening humanitarian crisis caused by the Israeli aggression against Lebanon. He saw the facilities that have been provided to returnees. My country categorically rejects the allegations made by some about returns. We look forward to the response of States Members of the United Nations to the appeals launched by the Organization's representatives and agencies to support our joint efforts as part of the humanitarian response. We thank those countries that have sent aid to Syria.

As to the concerns that the representative of the United States Administration just expressed about Syrians in Lebanon and returnees, a solution would have been available had his Administration been sincere, which it is not. The solution is for the United States Administration to stop its involvement in the killing of civilians in Palestine, Lebanon and Syria, to stop arming the Israeli killing machine and to enable the Security Council to fulfil its responsibility to maintain peace and security in the region. If it were concerned about Syrians, then it should have ended its

illegal presence, stopped the sanctions that collectively punish them and stopped plundering their national wealth. But of course, issues of human rights and international law are nothing but cards that the United States Administration can play for the purposes of political manipulation, pressure and blackmail in order to target specific countries.

We have seen how the United States Administration has silenced students and professors at American universities when they protested peacefully to demand an end to the genocide in Palestine and the crimes of the Israeli occupation and when they called for upholding the international law that is taught in those universities. We witness, on a daily basis, the representatives of the United States Administration competing in the Council and elsewhere to defend the genocide being perpetrated by Israel and its most heinous crimes — the bombing of civilian infrastructure, homes and peaceful civilians as well as all other atrocious crimes. Their words, therefore, will fool no one.

The terrorism that Syria is facing remains a form of Israeli aggression against it and is an extension of the terrorism to which the Palestinian people are being subjected at the hands of the occupation authorities and the settler gangs. In a familiar pattern, the Israeli aggression against my country has been accompanied by a marked upsurge in the crimes and attacks committed by terrorist organizations present in north-west Syria, which, together their affiliated entities and groups, are on the Council's sanctions lists. Those attacks have affected the neighbouring safe areas.

My country, Syria, stresses that it is its right and duty to eradicate terrorism and its sources. Syria holds the United States Administration and its allies fully responsible for investing in terrorism — which is a tool to serve their interests and those of the Israeli occupation entity — and responsible for the crimes committed by terrorist organizations against Syrians, including women, girls and children. My country warns that those policies and attempts to whitewash terrorist organizations heighten the risk of spreading extremist ideology and exacerbating the grave threat posed by terrorism to the security and stability of Syria, the region and the world.

In conclusion, my country remains committed to cooperating with the Special Envoy in line with his mandate of facilitating a Syrian-owned and Syrian-led process and in line with the full commitment to the sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial

integrity of the Syrian Arab Republic. We look forward to the outcome of his efforts to convene the ninth round of meetings of the Constitutional Committee and to his upcoming visit to Damascus.

**The President** (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

**Mr. Irvani** (Islamic Republic of Iran): We thank Mr. Pedersen, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, and Ms. Wosornu, Director of Operations and Advocacy, Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), for their briefings. We also listened to the views expressed by other briefers.

Respect for Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity is crucial to ensuring lasting peace and stability in Syria and the region and must be fully upheld by all. The Syrian people have an unquestionable right to determine their own future and destiny, free from external interference.

The Syrian people continue to suffer unbearable hardships, from economic instability to foreign occupation and terrorism. The humanitarian situation remains dire, and Syria is in urgent need of external assistance, especially in the light of the sharp reduction in donor contributions to United Nations programmes in the country and the recent influx of refugees from Lebanon. The United Nations humanitarian plan for Syria is only 26 per cent funded, and the annual pledges made by donors are not being fulfilled.

Despite the challenges that the Syrian Arab Republic faces, including hostile policies from Western countries and unilateral coercive measures, the Syrian Government continues to provide humanitarian assistance to those in need, particularly amid the influx of Lebanese refugees fleeing Israeli aggression. That commitment must be matched by equal resolve on the part of the international community to ensure that aid is delivered impartially and without political manipulation. We commend OCHA's efforts and those of its partners and the endeavours and cooperation of the Syrian Government to mobilize resources so as to support not only Syrians but also Lebanese arriving from Lebanon. The international community must support Syria's recovery efforts, including the rebuilding of infrastructure and sustainable development. Rebuilding Syria's critical infrastructure is key to its long-term stability. At the same time, the fight against terrorism

must continue with full respect for Syria's sovereignty. Eradicating terrorism is essential to restoring peace.

The path to sustainable normalization in Syria is an essential factor in peace and stability in the region. Yet the process is being obstructed by the destructive policies of Western States. The United States and its allies are pursuing their failed policy of inhumane unilateral sanctions, effectively using them as a tool for the collective punishment of the Syrian people. They are also politicizing humanitarian aid and obstructing international efforts to support Syria's reconstruction. Such harmful policies and practices have only prolonged the conflict and worsened the suffering of the Syrian people. Humanitarian assistance and reconstruction efforts should never be politicized or used as tools to pressure Syria. As we have said before, unilateral sanctions must be lifted. Doing so is a legal obligation and a moral necessity, as those harmful and illegal measures create only unnecessary hardship and hinder Syria's recovery.

On the political track, Iran remains committed to a political resolution of the situation in Syria and will continue supporting a truly Syrian-led, Syrian-owned and United Nations-facilitated political process. We continue to support the efforts of the United Nations and Special Envoy Pedersen for a political settlement of the Syrian crisis. Iran will spare no effort to that end. We advocate the prompt resumption of Constitutional Committee meetings as an effective mechanism to start the process. We hope that an agreeable venue for the Committee's meeting will be decided soon. We continue to believe that Baghdad is the most suitable option. We trust that the Special Envoy will redouble his efforts to facilitate the process.

We strongly condemn Israel's continued acts of aggression and brutal attacks on Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity, in blatant violation of international law and the Charter of the United Nations. Israel's occupying regime is deliberately pursuing a systematic policy to cripple the Syrian Arab Republic's infrastructure, exacerbating Syria's security challenges and undermining critical humanitarian efforts. As detailed in a letter dated 21 October from the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Syrian Arab Republic to the Secretary-General, since 7 October 2023, Israel has launched more than 116 attacks on Syrian territory, alongside its genocidal war in Gaza and the occupied Palestinian territories. Those terrorist attacks resulted in the deaths of more than 100 civilians, including 12

children, and the widespread destruction of schools, hospitals, airports and other civilian infrastructure. Even refugees fleeing the violence have not been spared, with Israeli strikes targeting the border crossings between Syria and Lebanon, intensifying the humanitarian crisis and endangering those seeking safety. Those actions are flagrant violations of international law, and Israel must urgently be held accountable for its ongoing aggression. The protection and support that the regime receives from the United States emboldens its continued acts of violence across the region, allowing it to act without consequence.

Now more than ever, the regime poses a grave and undeniable threat to international peace and security. Its relentless acts of terror are pushing the region to the brink of full-scale war. Israel's blatant disregard for all red lines is deeply concerning, as it shamelessly targets humanitarian convoys, facilities and relief workers without restraint. On 9 October, the regime deliberately destroyed a humanitarian aid facility established by the Iranian Red Crescent Society and coordinated with Syria, about which the International Committee of the Red Cross had been notified. That facility, including a field hospital offering life-saving aid to displaced Lebanese civilians, was completely destroyed by Israeli air strikes — an intolerable and reckless assault on humanitarian efforts.

Just yesterday, in its ongoing campaign of relentless terrorist attacks on civilians in Lebanon, the Israeli regime assassinated Iranian doctor and relief worker, Ali Heidari, in Beirut. Dr. Heidari provided critical medical care, treating the wounded and assisting those in need of care. That heinous crime is a clear violation of the 1949 Geneva Conventions, which prohibit attacks on hospitals and medical personnel, constituting war crimes. In yet another outrageous act, on 19 October, the private vehicle of an Iranian woman named Masoumeh Karbasi and her Lebanese husband was struck by a missile fired from an Israeli drone in the densely populated area of Jounieh, in Beirut. Immediately after the attack, they stopped the car and sought refuge on the side of the street and in an open parking lot nearby. At that moment, a second missile hit them, resulting in their martyrdom. That atrocity crime was captured on surveillance cameras and has since been broadcast across media outlets.

In conclusion, since the start of its genocidal campaign in Gaza and the subsequent aggression against Lebanon, Israel has relentlessly targeted medical facilities

and personnel, reducing hospitals to rubble, killing patients and the wounded and martyring hundreds of health-care workers. This brutal assault on humanitarian services must not go unanswered, and the perpetrators must be held accountable. The international community stands united in its call for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza and Lebanon, and the Security Council must fulfil its responsibility. We once again urge the Council to take swift, decisive action to compel Israel to end its aggression and atrocity crimes in Gaza, Lebanon and Syria and to ensure full compliance with international law and the relevant Security Council resolutions. The time for action is now.

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

**Mr. Yıldız (Türkiye):** I am also grateful to Special Envoy Pedersen, Director Wosornu, Ms. Haj Ibrahim and Ms. Jarbawi for their briefings.

Unfortunately, the escalating violence in the Middle East remains a grave concern. The spillover of the conflict in Gaza into the broader region has gone from a risk to a harsh reality that we are now facing. Israel's indiscriminate, brutal attacks on Gaza and Lebanon are having severe repercussions for Syria and the whole region, particularly affecting the more than 700,000 Syrian refugees in Lebanon. According to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, approximately 425,000 people are estimated to have crossed from Lebanon into Syria since the escalation of hostilities. That mass influx, coupled with Syria's catastrophic humanitarian crisis, is straining the already fragile situation and exacerbating the pre-existing needs for humanitarian assistance.

The international community must not abandon the Syrian population, which continues to suffer from the absence of a political resolution. The funding shortfall for the United Nations humanitarian response plan must be urgently addressed. Humanitarian aid and early-recovery initiatives should be substantially increased. New dynamics on the ground require adjustments to both the budget and the delivery modalities of humanitarian assistance. The deepening crisis in Syria poses significant risks to regional stability in an already volatile environment. It is essential that all parties exercise maximum restraint to prevent further escalation. Türkiye will continue to facilitate cross-border humanitarian assistance in close cooperation with the United Nations, as we have done consistently to this day.

The 13-year conflict in Syria has inflicted immense suffering on millions, who endure restricted political freedoms, a failing economy, mass displacement, terrorism and a continually worsening humanitarian situation, in addition to the hundreds of thousands of casualties. We are closely monitoring recent developments in Idlib. Everybody should be careful. Preventing further escalation is imperative, and Türkiye remains committed to helping to reach that goal. The resolution of the Syrian conflict can be achieved only through a holistic approach based on resolution 2254 (2015). As we have stated before, a comprehensive settlement requires simultaneous progress on the following tracks: first, the revitalization of the political process through convening the ninth round of the Constitution Committee without delay; secondly, the creation of conditions for the safe, voluntary and dignified return of Syrian refugees; thirdly, the preservation of Syria's territorial integrity and political unity alongside robust counter-terrorism efforts; and fourthly, the uninterrupted delivery of humanitarian aid into Syria. National reconciliation must also be an integral part of efforts to establish lasting peace in Syria. Progress in the political process would also facilitate steps to improve the living conditions of the Syrian people.

Türkiye is fully committed to Syria's territorial integrity and unity. One of the most dangerous consequences of the Syrian conflict has been the presence of terrorist organizations exploiting the chaos to further their separatist ambitions. They are the biggest threat to Syria's territorial integrity.

I am grateful to the Secretary-General and all members of the Council for expressing messages of solidarity with Türkiye against the terrorist act in Ankara. To my knowledge, all data so far validate that the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) planned and executed that attack against the Turkish aviation industry, which serves not only Türkiye but friendly countries, especially in Africa and other parts of the world, in their fight against terrorism. We warned everybody repeatedly before about that organization and its separatist agenda and its actions against civilians to cause mass casualties. That is why at the next meeting I hope all members will put the name of the PKK and its offshoots — the Syrian Democratic Forces, the Partiya Yekitiya Demokrat and the People's Protection Units — in their talking points when naming the terrorist organizations in Syria, because many members name some terror organizations but exclude

the PKK and its offshoots deliberately. I thank members again for their messages of solidarity.

**The President:** The representative of the United States has asked for the floor to make a further statement.

**Mr. Wood** (United States of America): I apologize for taking the floor, but I need to respond to a few things that were said by the representative of the Al-Assad regime. He first made the claim that the United States crushes expression — students who are trying to express their views on Gaza on college campuses. That is absolutely absurd. The freedom of speech is an important tenet in American life. It is enshrined in our Constitution. I would just ask one question of the regime's representative. Does the Al-Assad regime allow Syrian students, political activists and members of civil society to protest freely? I think we know the answer to that. We have seen it over the years from the Al-Assad regime. We saw it on full display during the Arab Spring and leading up to today. Therefore, I think the representative needs to think twice about bringing the issue of free speech before the Council and criticizing the United States, when we know exactly what the regime does to Syrian citizens who do not agree with the regime and want to protest.

One other point on this that we have made many times, which I think is worth repeating again, is that the United States is not in Syria to plunder its resources. That is just a lie that the Syrian regime continues to propagate. We are there to fight the Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham. We have been very open about that. I just want to put that to rest, but I am sure he will raise it once again.

My last point is addressed to the representative of Iran. Iran, of course, likes to paint itself as a victim of aggression everywhere in the world, when we know, through its proxies all around the world, that it carries out terrorist attacks against innocent civilians. Let us just look at what happened twice since April when the regime launched hundreds of missiles against the citizens of Israel. Had they not been intercepted, there would have been significant loss of life and major damage to civilian infrastructure.

I think it is important when members hear such comments to put them in the appropriate context.

**The President:** The representative of the Syrian Arab Republic has asked for the floor to make a further statement. I now give him the floor.

**Mr. Aldahhak** (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): I did not have the intention of taking the floor again, but what the representative of the United States Administration said made me do so. I will be brief.

In every meeting, the representative of the United States Administration tries to find false excuses and misleading allegations to justify the aggressive policy of his country against my country, Syria, and others. In every meeting, he repeats baseless allegations and starts giving us lectures about human rights and other issues just to cover up the policies of his Administration, which is now covering up the most heinous crimes committed by the Israeli occupation authorities. Humankind has never witnessed such crimes since the Second World War. His Administration is not only covering up those crimes, but it is directly engaging in them by sending to the occupier the most lethal and destructive weapons and the most technically advanced ones, known as smart weapons, but I do not see how they are smart. His Administration also is sending defence systems to defend the occupier and to prolong its occupation of Arab territories in Palestine, Syria and Lebanon and to embolden it to continue with its crimes.

Tomorrow, 24 October, marks the date that the Charter of the United Nations entered into force. After relentless efforts to draft and adopt it, in the face of previous wars, the Charter starts with a collective commitment to save future generations from the scourge. Following decades of implementation of the Charter, the United States Administration is today undermining the Charter and its principles, as well as the foundations and pillars of our Organization, by obstructing United Nations mechanisms, including the Security Council, in order to cover up for Israel, paralyse the Organization and hinder the collective security system. The United States practices are clear to everyone, and the representative of the United States Administration cannot deny them. That is the best testimony of the falsehood of his allegations.

**The President** (*spoke in French*): The representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran has asked for the floor to make a further statement. I now give him the floor.

**Mr. Iravani** (Islamic Republic of Iran): I want to emphasize that we never initiated an attack on the Israeli regime. We solely responded to their aggression according to international law. The United States is the main supporter of that brutal regime. Without the United States supportive action, Israel could not continue that brutal aggressions and criminal acts against Palestinians, Lebanese and Syrians.

**The President** (*spoke in French*): The representative of the United States has asked for the floor to make a further statement. Before this last round, I recall that this is a place of respect towards each other. This is where we try to focus our statements, to add something to the discussion.

**Mr. Wood** (United States of America): I will be very brief. Let me just say that, based on its history, the Al-Assad regime is in no position to criticize the United States, claiming that we are somehow violating the Charter of the United Nations. This is a regime that everyone must be reminded has used chemical weapons repeatedly against its own people. It is important that we not forget that and put that in the proper context.

**The President**: The representative of the Syrian Arab Republic has asked for the floor to make a further statement. I now give him the floor for a short statement.

**Mr. Aldahhak** (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): I will be very brief. The representative of the United States Administration, which destroyed the city of Raqqa under the excuse of combating terrorism, killing tens of thousands of its residents and burying them under the rubble of its buildings, is a supporter of terrorism. It created terrorism, invested in it and used it against Syrians to destabilize Syria. The presence of United States forces in Syria is not to combat terrorism, because they simply can stop it if they wish. They are there to steal our oil, our revenues and the Syrians' wealth. That has nothing to do with combating terrorism.

*The meeting rose at 5.30 p.m.*