



# Security Council

Eightieth year

## 9832<sup>nd</sup> meeting

Wednesday, 8 January 2025, 10 a.m.

New York

*Provisional*

---

<i>President:</i>	Mr. Bendjama . . . . .	(Algeria)
<i>Members:</i>	China . . . . .	Mr. Fu Cong
	Denmark . . . . .	Ms. Lassen
	France . . . . .	Mr. Dharmadhikari
	Greece . . . . .	Mr. Sekeris
	Guyana . . . . .	Ms. Persaud
	Pakistan . . . . .	Mr. Akram
	Panama . . . . .	Mr. Alfaro de Alba
	Republic of Korea . . . . .	Mr. Hwang
	Russian Federation . . . . .	Mr. Nebenzia
	Sierra Leone . . . . .	Ms. Karim
	Slovenia . . . . .	Mr. Žbogar
	Somalia . . . . .	Mr. Osman
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland . .	Dame Barbara Woodward
	United States of America . . . . .	Ms. Shea

## Agenda

The situation in the Middle East

---

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the translation of speeches delivered in other languages. The final text will be printed in the *Official Records of the Security Council*. *Corrections* should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room AB-0928 (verbatimrecords@un.org). Corrected records will be reissued electronically on the Official Document System of the United Nations (<http://documents.un.org>).



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

### **Adoption of the agenda**

*The agenda was adopted.*

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

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

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the following briefers to participate in the meeting: Mr. Geir Pedersen, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria; and Mr. Tom Fletcher, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator.

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

I give the floor to Mr. Pedersen.

**Mr. Pedersen:** Today Syria seeks to chart a new course following the fall of the former regime, just one month ago. Decisions taken now will determine the future for a long time to come. There are great opportunities and real dangers. Syrians and the international community need to get the next phase right, and the United Nations stands ready to do everything we can to facilitate, to help and to support.

I have six points to make today.

First, the caretaker authorities continue to work to structure and consolidate their authority. The caretaker authorities are formed largely of individuals from the former Idlib Government. Several governors have also been appointed — not all of whom have been officially announced — who appear to be their affiliates or members of armed groups. There are reports of an agreement in principle to merge factions under a single Ministry of Defence, although the implementation status remains unclear, with some factions reportedly not yet party to that agreement.

We have also seen some incidents of local forces restricting access for forces affiliated with the caretaker authorities and preventing them from entering areas that those local forces control, especially in the south. Meanwhile, a process has also been initiated to settle the status of former army officials through reconciliation centres.

The caretaker authorities have issued the first list of military appointments in the new Ministry of Defence. They appear to be drawn from a range of factions, including Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham, and also include fighters from foreign countries. The caretaker authorities have held meetings with a very broad range of representatives of, and individuals from, different Syrian groups and components. They also met with visiting Foreign Ministers and senior officials, and caretaker Foreign Minister Al-Shaibani has just returned from a regional visit.

My second point is that there are signs of instability within areas under the control of the caretaker authorities. While there are many areas where law and order appears to be good, we have seen multiple reports of incidents of violence — in the coastal region and Homs and Hama in particular — including accounts of degrading and humiliating treatment.

The caretaker authorities have also carried out patrols and what they term “combing operations”, arresting former officials or elements whom they accuse of war crimes or of refusing to hand in weapons and settle. There have been some reports of clashes with what are described as former regime elements that have resulted in casualties, including from within the caretaker authorities. There have been videos

circulating of what appear to be abuse or extrajudicial killings of officials from the former regime, though we note reports of the caretaker authorities arresting some perpetrators. There are also reports that plans for public sector restructuring may leave many without livelihoods, which may push them into need and further jeopardize stability. On that and all issues, we urge the caretaker authorities to extend a hand of reassurance and trust to all communities in Syria, fostering the active engagement of all in building the new Syria.

My third point is that there are significant areas outside the control of the caretaker authorities, the conflict continues and there are also very real threats to Syria's sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity. The north-east and parts of Aleppo city remain under the control of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) and the People's Protection Units. Despite a United States-brokered ceasefire near Manbij in December 2024, there have been reports of clashes and exchanges of artillery fire between the SDF and Syrian National Army forces in particular. Türkiye has made statements indicating a clear possibility that Turkish military operations could intensify in the north-east. At the same time, channels of dialogue have been established between the caretaker authorities and the SDF, who met last week in Damascus. Public statements suggest the charting out of positions but not yet the prospect of imminent agreement.

I continue to call for and support the further development of all channels of dialogue and to urge all parties to find a way forward without military confrontation. We are deeply concerned about the continued Israeli military presence and activity, including beyond the area of separation in violation of the Agreement on Disengagement between Israeli and Syrian Forces of 1974. Furthermore, restrictions on the freedom of movement of the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force imposed by the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) should be lifted without delay. Attacks on Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity must stop. Reports of the IDF using live ammunition against civilians and its displacement and destruction of civilian infrastructure are also very worrisome. Such violations, along with Israeli air strikes in other parts of Syria — reported even last week in Aleppo — could further jeopardize the prospects for an orderly political transition.

Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) remains a significant concern, with ongoing ISIL activities and worries that they may seek to take advantage of the security flux in some areas. United States-led coalition operations against ISIL continued, including United States and French targeted air strikes.

My fourth point is that the needs of the Syrian people remain acute. Mr. Fletcher will say more on that, but access to basic and essential services, including healthcare, water and electricity, and housing remain enormous challenges. The obstacles to the return of internally displaced persons and refugees remain considerable, particularly the lack of livelihoods, damaged and destroyed infrastructure and widespread landmines, resulting in mounting casualties. I welcome the recent issuance of a new temporary general licence by the United States Government, but much more significant work in fully addressing sanctions and designations will inevitably be necessary.

My fifth point is that the way forward on the political transition is unclear. There are positive elements to build on, but Syrians are also expressing points of concern. The leadership initially projected that the current caretaker authorities would operate for up to three months in order to ensure no State collapse, followed by broader transitional arrangements. However, there are significant decisions or positions being taken that many Syrians feel should be left to a more inclusive transitional phase, such as articulating positions on the character of the State before a constitutional phase or issuing long-term policy decisions with regard to the security sector or in fields such as education. In a wide-ranging interview, Mr. Ahmed Al-Sharaa stated that there

would be a national dialogue process, which would be inclusive and comprehensive of many of the Syrian sects, with voting on important and critical issues that should be the foundation of the transitional period. He spoke of a constitution-drafting process carried out by experts that could take two to three years. He spoke of elections that could take up to four years, given what he says are necessary preparations, including civil documentation and population data.

Some Syrians have received the signals from the caretaker authorities positively, especially in terms of stressing inclusiveness and the need to engage a broad spectrum of Syrians in shaping the transitional phase and to draw on the expertise of Syrians of all kinds. At the same time, we have heard concerns about the lack of transparency on the timing, framework, goals and procedures in any national dialogue conference, as well as participation in terms of criteria for attendance and balance of representation.

It is crucially important that the process is not rushed and that it is well prepared and thought through. In that regard, I welcome the fact that the caretaker authorities have now clarified publicly that the conference has been delayed until an expanded Preparatory Committee can be formed that includes what was called comprehensive representation of Syria from all segments and governorates.

That leads me to my sixth point: we are ready to work with the caretaker authorities on how the nascent and important ideas and steps so far articulated and initiated could be developed towards a credible and inclusive political transition. Further to the Council's important press statement of 17 December (SC/15943), I believe it is well understood that resolution 2254 (2015) cannot be applied in a literal manner. For instance, the former regime will not be a party to any future process, and there are other examples too. Clearly, there is a need for a new approach and new modes of thinking on many fronts. But that being said, there is wide consensus that a transition should still achieve the main things that resolution 2254 (2015) laid out.

First, it must achieve a credible, inclusive and transparent Syrian-led and -owned transition. And on that, let me be clear: I do not believe any Syrian is asking for quotas based on sect or ethnicity or importing models from other countries but rather including the broadest spectrum of Syrian society and Syrian parties so as to inspire public confidence in the transition.

Secondly, it must ensure a credible, inclusive and non-sectarian transitional Government.

Thirdly, it must draw up a new Constitution, prepared through a credible and inclusive process.

Fourthly, it must ensure free and fair elections, inclusive of all Syrians, in accordance with international standards.

Over the past few weeks, Syrian women have reinforced their expectations and intent to participate in decision-making throughout the transition process and beyond, at the national and local levels. They stress their expectation that any constitutional revision safeguards women's rights and evolved roles and status. Syrian women have much to contribute, and the country should grasp that collective capacity fully.

Let me also stress that the call for justice, accountability and reparation is being strongly echoed across different spectrums of society and is a necessary and fundamental safeguard of sustainable peace and social cohesion. This is a long process, obviously, but immediate practical steps are necessary, such as access and authorization for specialized organizations, both local and international, to undertake the work on preservation and documentation. Syrians have accumulated years of work on those issues that must be built on and optimized, as has the United Nations, including the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to Assist in the

Investigation and Prosecution of Persons Responsible for the Most Serious Crimes under International Law Committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011, the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic and the newly established Independent Institution on Missing Persons in Syria— all of which have a fundamental role to play today.

The points that I have described are widely shared among a broad spectrum of Syrians — civil society activists, women and political forces. I take good note of the fact that the caretaker authorities' leadership has spoken of the need for inclusiveness, including participation from different components, in addition to the need for a new constitution and elections. There are therefore tremendous opportunities for building a foundation for lasting peace and stability in Syria. However, missteps and missed opportunities could pose risks to Syria's future and plant seeds of instability. But I do believe that common ground on those issues can readily be developed in a dialogue with the caretaker authorities, and there is genuine expertise and support that can be made available to support a Syrian-led process.

I also firmly believe that working on an inclusive political transition is the most effective means of inspiring confidence and ensuring that Syria quickly receives the economic support that it desperately needs, which requires, in turn, a smooth end to sanctions, appropriate action on designations and major funding, including for reconstruction. I have informally and formally sought to follow up with the caretaker authorities on the transition and all related issues in an open manner and in partnership, and I believe it is vital that that take place. In order to provide all necessary engagement and support, we are already moving to strengthen the presence and expertise of our political mission in Damascus. And there is an active United Nations plan to ensure delivery as one across all themes of potential support for a credible and inclusive transition. My Deputy Special Envoy, Ms. Rochdi, and many members of our team are in Syria to follow up and to conduct further outreach with a wide range of Syrians, and I hope to return to Damascus at the earliest possible time.

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

I now give the floor to Mr. Fletcher.

**Mr. Fletcher:** I thank Special Envoy Pedersen.

Recent weeks have been less turbulent than those that preceded our most recent discussion (see S/PV.9817), but the scale of the humanitarian crisis remains as significant. Following my briefing to the Council from Damascus, I travelled to Homs, Aleppo and Idlib to meet Syrian civilians and humanitarians. As Special Envoy Pedersen underlined, we must seize the opportunity of this moment. Those visits underscored three critical humanitarian challenges that we and the people of Syria face.

The first is the need to preserve and rebuild essential services. Health services, already weakened by years of conflict, have been further closed or scaled back, at a time when nearly 15 million people require humanitarian health support. Access to water has been restricted, including by fighting at the Tishreen Dam in eastern Aleppo, affecting water and electricity for more than 400,000 people, and close to 13 million people are still facing acute food insecurity, at a time when the World Food Programme (WFP) has been forced to reduce food assistance by 80 per cent in the past two years, owing to funding shortfalls. Lack of food, water and power is exacerbated by the lack of fuel and liquidity.

A second priority is the protection of civilians. While many of those uprooted in November and December have returned to their homes, more than 620,000 people remain displaced as harsh winter conditions arrive in many parts of the country. That comes on top of the more than 7 million who were already displaced. In the

north-west alone, 2 million people remain in camps and informal sites. In Idlib, I met some of those civilians at the Tajmo Allij camp. Most want to return home but cite a lack of adequate services and damage to infrastructure, as well as unexploded munitions. And in Aleppo, I met children injured by the deadly legacy of conflict. Partners have identified more than 100 contaminated locations since late November across Aleppo, Idlib, Hama and Latakia. Meanwhile, air strikes have killed civilians and damaged civilian infrastructure, and in the south, Israeli incursions have forced civilians, including children, the injured and residents, to evacuate parts of Qunaytirah governorate.

A third priority — a third risk — is the threat that women and girls will be marginalized. Throughout my visit, I was struck by their determination to contribute to Syria's future. Rayan, a 12-year-old girl in Aleppo who lost her leg to unexploded ordnance, hopes to be a doctor. Zainab, whose husband was held at Saydnaya prison for years and who received his death certificate the morning that we met, wants to see her children complete their education. Jamila, raising four children alone, wants to pursue a university degree. Syria's future depends on women like Rayan, Zainab and Jamila. Their voices must be heard in this critical period.

As the security situation has stabilized, we have been able to resume our humanitarian operations at much greater scale. In December, we sent 298 trucks of aid through border crossings with Türkiye — as many as crossed during the previous six months. The World Health Organization has supported a European Union humanitarian air bridge providing 50 tons of supplies to northern Syria. In the north-east, a cholera vaccination campaign is under way at the Al-Hol camp. UNICEF and partners have led work to restore the functioning of the Tishreen Dam and to rehabilitate other water supplies, including the Ayn Al-Bayda station. The WFP and partners have provided bread for more than 2.5 million people. Children and mothers are receiving treatment for malnutrition. But we must do more. This month, we will roll out a countrywide rapid needs assessment. We are also adjusting our coordination structures to meet the new operational context.

As ever, I have three asks of the Security Council.

The first ask is for the Council's support for the clear assurances that I received from the caretaker authorities that international humanitarian law will be respected, civilians protected and humanitarian organizations allowed to operate freely. We are continuing our engagement with the caretaker authorities on putting in place new ways of working, including new procedures for registering non-governmental organizations. We remain in daily contact on practicalities, and I assess that partnership to be serious and genuine. But security, particularly in Aleppo, Deir ez-Zor, Latakia and Tartus, remains a challenge. Occasional theft and looting have impeded vaccination support in Homs and insulin supply in Hama, and capacity gaps clearly remain.

My second ask, as ever, is money, including for the longer-term support that Syria needs. Our humanitarian response is only a third funded. Today I have allocated from the United Nations Central Emergency Response Fund an additional \$8 million, for a total of \$20 million, to support the rapid scaling-up of humanitarian operations in Syria, and we welcome recent aid announcements for Syria, including, importantly, from the region. The United Nations and partners encourage donors to coordinate even more closely to ensure that this support provides the greatest benefit, collectively, for people across the country.

My third ask is to ensure an efficient flow of support into and through Syria. That means that sanctions should not impede humanitarian support. The United States announcement of a new general licence covering transactions with Syrian governing institutions provides a welcome signal.

That also means support for and from Syria's neighbours. Following my visit to Syria, I held practical discussions with authorities in Türkiye, in Lebanon and in Jordan. Operations are continuing at scale through border crossings with Türkiye, but cross-line movement remains a challenge in the north-east of Syria. Existing procedures, including for the movement of aid workers, have been reinstated at the Lebanese border crossing. The Jaber-Nasib crossing with Jordan is also operational, though procedures for humanitarian movements are still being clarified. We are working with the caretaker authorities in Damascus to swiftly establish clear procedures at that crossing and at the seaports. We are also testing deliveries through Iraq to complement existing movements by non-governmental organization partners.

The active engagement of the Council and the international community remains vital in this period of uneasy transition. We need to act with great urgency and vigour. Above all, and all power to Special Envoy Pedersen's elbow, we need the peaceful political transition that will help us to reduce humanitarian needs. We must stand with the people of Syria at this time. The humanitarian operation can have a great impact if we are serious, bold and committed in their support.

**The President:** I thank Mr. Fletcher for his briefing.

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

**Ms. Shea** (United States of America): I would like to thank Special Envoy Pedersen and Under-Secretary-General Fletcher for their briefings.

As we have made clear, the United States supports a Syrian-led and Syrian-owned political process, in the spirit of Security Council resolution 2254 (2015). That process should result in an inclusive and representative Government that fully respects the human rights and fundamental freedoms of all Syrians, including women and Syria's diverse communities.

The transition process and resulting Syrian Government must also ensure that any elements of a remaining chemical weapons programme are identified, secured and safely destroyed under international verification. We are encouraged by the cooperation to date and call for the continued commitment of relevant actors in Syria to work with the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), the United Nations, and other State and non-State partners to chart a course for the complete and verifiable elimination of any remaining elements of a chemical weapons programme. We emphasize the importance of identifying Syrian points of contact to work with the OPCW to set that plan in motion and to provide the security and safety guarantees for OPCW personnel to conduct their verification work.

It is also vital for actors in Syria to allow access for United Nations entities, other international organizations and civil society to secure documentation, safeguard mass graves and prisons, and assist released detainees and the families of those whose whereabouts remain unknown.

As we have noted previously, we were encouraged to hear about the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism (IIIM) visit to Syria and the announcement of a new head of the Independent Institution on Missing Persons in the Syrian Arab Republic. We urge interim entities to work closely with those institutions and civil society partners. We further urge Syria's interim entities to deter individual acts of vengeance and to partner with the IIIM to identify paths to ensure accountability.

The United States welcomes positive messages from Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham but will ultimately look for progress in actions and words that will explore policies and prioritize the well-being of the Syrian people.

Earlier this week, the United States issued General Licence 24 to expand authorizations for activities and transactions in Syria following 8 December 2024.

The General Licence underscores our commitment to ensuring that United States sanctions do not impede activities to meet basic human needs, including the provision of public services or humanitarian assistance. That authorization is for six months, as the United States continues to monitor the evolving situation on the ground.

The United States is committed to assisting Syrians in this extraordinary moment to forge a new future for and by its people. It is critical that all external actors be mindful of the need to maintain stability in Syria. Syria should not be used as a platform to extend other countries' interests at the expense of the Syrian people. Syria's interim entities must ensure the country does not pose a threat to its neighbours, serve as a base for terrorism, or give refuge to groups like the Islamic State or Da'esh. In north-east Syria, maintaining the security of detention facilities and displaced persons camps and repatriating foreign nationals remain integral to prevent the resurgence of Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham and promote stability in the region. We look forward to helping secure a brighter future for the Syrian people, who desperately need our support, and helping Syria to reclaim its rightful place regionally and on the world stage.

**Mr. Nebenzia** (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We would like to thank Special Envoy Pedersen and the head of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, Tom Fletcher, for their briefings on the situation in the Syrian Arab Republic, developments in which are being closely followed by the entire international community.

Our friends, the brotherly Syrian people, who we have always supported and will continue to support, are going through a new stage in their history. For the time being, it is hard to clearly assess the processes taking place on the territory of Syria. They are often extremely contradictory in nature.

We have not yet seen the resumption of the work of key State institutions and companies vitally important for the sustenance of the population. It is not clear how inclusive policies for the future Syria, for which we have all called, will be ensured. There is a fairly high risk of the intensification of hostilities that have encompassed many regions of the country, in particular Aleppo, Deir ez-Zor, Homs and Quneitra, as well as in the north and the area beyond the Euphrates. In other words, Syria has more than enough problems, and their severity should in no case be underestimated.

We would in particular like to point to the direct threat to the territorial integrity of Syria resulting from the unlawful actions of Israel, which is carrying out a policy of fait accompli in the occupied Golan Heights. Some 500 square kilometres of Syrian land have already been seized. The actions of Israel are a gross violation of international legal decisions, including numerous decisions of the Security Council and the General Assembly. We call upon colleagues on the Security Council and representatives of the Secretariat of the United Nations to give an honest assessment of the events.

In these circumstances, Syria continues to face a dire humanitarian crisis, which the head of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs described to us today. Millions of citizens of the long-suffering country continue to face serious food shortages and to lack adequate medical care. That situation has been consistently compounded by Washington, which for several years has been de facto occupying the northeastern region of Syria, which is its most resource-rich. It is also applying the pressure of stringent sanctions on Damascus and encouraging its satellites to follow suit. As a result, the Syrian economy is under tremendous pressure and is unable to contend with the challenges facing the country.

Against that extremely alarming backdrop, international humanitarian agencies, which have lost their main partners in the Syrian Arab Red Crescent Society, have been forced to begin their relief efforts, in essence, from scratch. Israeli air strikes



and shelling combined with the rampant violence seen in many regions is taking a toll on the civilian population and disrupting civilian infrastructure. Regular reports of vitally important infrastructure being disabled are worrisome. More than 400,000 people in the suburbs of Manbij and Kobani have been left without water and electricity, after the hydroelectric power plant at Tishrin stopped working. Power grids and roads have been destroyed in southern Idlib and northern Hama. Hospitals and primary medical care centres throughout the country are severely overstretched.

That being so, as we see it, the primary task of the new Syrian authorities is to stop the bloodshed that has engulfed the country. Those events are not contributing to stability, and, over the past month, they have forced hundreds of thousands of ordinary Syrians to flee their homes. Those people are experiencing great hardship. Many of them lack access to clean water, sanitation and basic hygiene products. That situation must see a swift and fundamental improvement — something that the overwhelming majority of Syrians desire.

We all understand that the new authorities have a long way to go in remedying the dire socioeconomic situation and in establishing effectively functioning State institutions. To that end, they will certainly need the support of the international community. That, in our view, is where the focus of the Security Council's efforts should be. Without external aid that is grounded in the principles of humanity and impartiality, Syrians simply will not be able to withstand the ordeals that they are facing. It is imperative that assistance be provided to all Syrians throughout the country, free from politicization, discrimination and preconditions.

We find it regrettable that Western donors are failing to honour their pledges, with only one third of the humanitarian plan for 2024 funded despite the sharp increase in already immense needs. Furthermore, they are not easing the illegal unilateral sanctions that are exacerbating the suffering of the civilian population. It is also important to understand that what happened in Syria did not take place in a vacuum, but against the backdrop of an ongoing and unprecedented escalation of violence in the region that began in Gaza and spread to the West Bank, Lebanon, Syria and Yemen. The extremely dangerous and provocative rhetoric against Tehran has also not abated. In our view, particular responsibility for that lies with the United States, which has blocked all decisions on a ceasefire in Gaza so that West Jerusalem is not prevented from pursuing its military operation there. We find it regrettable that, on account of Washington, the Council has still not been able to fulfil its direct mandate for the maintenance of peace and security.

We are all also very aware that Syria will not have a decent future unless there is a sustainable political process. That being so, the key provisions of the all-important resolution 2254 (2015) on a political transition and the inclusive nature of a political process remain fully relevant. Of continued relevance are the requirements contained in the resolution to respect the sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity of Syria. Undermining those foundations or seeking to supplant them are unacceptable and fraught with irreversible consequences for the future of the country. We are convinced that it is the Syrians and the Syrians alone who, through an inclusive national dialogue, must determine the future of their country, and we call upon all responsible members of the international community to adhere strictly to that approach and to provide the people of Syria with all the assistance that they need. At the same time, any competition among the key external players and Syria's neighbours is unacceptable, as is the promotion of self-serving agendas or geopolitical interests in the Syrian arena.

In that context, we support Special Envoy Pedersen's efforts to seek a nationwide de-escalation, a resumption of the political process through United Nations mediation and the convening of an international conference on Syria with a wide range of participants. Unless all of those approaches are built upon, the creation of a new

Syria will be doomed to failure. We very much hope that the Special Envoy will be able to ensure that the United Nations has a worthy role to play in the Syrian settlement, as that would suit the long-term interests of the country, the Middle East and the international community as a whole. Russia stands ready to participate in those efforts for the sake of the Syrian people and their neighbours. We specifically intend to continue providing the Syrian people with assistance of all kinds, including through the specialized international agencies, the provision of humanitarian relief, the rebuilding of the social infrastructure facilities destroyed during the conflict and the creation of a solid basis for the return of Syrian refugees and internally displaced persons.

**Ms. Lassen** (Denmark): I would like to thank Special Envoy Pedersen and Under-Secretary-General Fletcher for their briefings and for their strong engagement on this file in the past intense weeks.

Exactly one month ago, a new day dawned in Syria. The world watched in astonishment as the fall of the Al-Assad regime inspired hope in millions of Syrians — the hope of a bright and just future for all Syrians to live in freedom and dignity and a future in which the stability, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Syria is upheld. Denmark shares that same hope and stands firmly in solidarity with the Syrian people, who for more than half a century suffered under a brutal dictatorship. There are many facets to this new developing situation, but allow me to focus on four.

First, the humanitarian crisis in Syria remains extremely dire, as we heard from the Under-Secretary-General this morning. Even with reports of more aid coming in, the combination of winter weather and the severe underfunding of the humanitarian response plan leaves millions of Syrians lacking the basic means to survive. Denmark has scaled up its funding for Syria, and we urge all donors to do the same. Aid deliveries through all possible means must continue and increase. Humanitarian access to and through areas affected by the conflict must also be ensured. We thank Switzerland for their tireless efforts as the humanitarian penholder on this file and assure the Council of Denmark's steadfast commitment to improving the humanitarian situation across Syria as we take over that role.

Secondly, only with justice can the deep scars of more than a decade of violence begin to heal. Images of torture prisons and mass graves highlight the need for accountability for the crimes of the Al-Assad regime. For far too long, the families of missing persons have agonized, the whereabouts of their loved ones unknown. Certainty about the thousands of disappeared Syrians must be established. Denmark fully supports the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, the Independent Institution on Missing Persons in the Syrian Arab Republic and the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism. We welcome the interim authorities' call to provide justice for the thousands of torture victims of the Al-Assad regime and encourage them to launch a broad and inclusive transitional justice process. As an immediate measure, we urge the interim authorities to promptly secure all evidence of crime found in prisons, government offices and archives and ensure that they can be preserved for future proceedings. We welcome the Commission of Inquiry's first visit to Syria and call for the interim authorities to cooperate with the Commission.

My third point relates to the security situation. Denmark commends the efforts undertaken to de-escalate the violence inside Syria, including between the Syrian National Army and the Syrian Democratic Forces. De-escalation is the first step on the path to political dialogue. Denmark also underscores the importance of the continued fight against terrorism. Terrorist groups such as the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) or Da'esh, Al-Qaida and their affiliates should not be allowed to take advantage of the situation and regain momentum. Denmark has been

committed to combating ISIL since the group's emergence. We remain vigilant in hindering a resurgence in ISIL attacks in the region and globally. Denmark reiterates its full support for the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) and underlines that Israel must withdraw from the area of separation. While we recognize the legitimate Israeli security concerns, UNDOF must be allowed to move freely and implement its mandate unhindered. We urge all parties to comply with their obligations in that regard. Our overarching goal must be a safe and secure Syria. To achieve that, we need to scale up long-term and sustainable support for early recovery. That can help consolidate and expand the security gains made and mark the beginning of a new era with a safe Syria in which those who choose to return home receive the support they need.

At this critical time in Syria, an inclusive political process must be front of mind for all of us. Denmark fully supports a Syrian-led and Syrian-owned political process in the spirit of resolution 2254 (2015). It is paramount that the Council remain united in that regard. And let me be clear, inclusive peace leads to durable peace. The political process must incorporate all parts of Syrian society. In particular, Syrian women must be in the room and at the table when the future of the country is shaped. That is not only the right thing to do, but it is also the smart thing to do, because as the Special Envoy said this morning, Syrian women have much to contribute. Similarly, we call for the representation of youth and minorities. Denmark fully supports the work of Special Envoy Pedersen and his call for an inclusive political dialogue. We encourage the interim authorities to heed that call and urge them to share a clear road map for a credible and inclusive transition that includes the build-up of institutions and the drafting of a new constitution on the basis of a broad national dialogue.

In conclusion, the challenges facing Syria are great, they are interconnected, but they are not insurmountable. Recent developments offer a rare opportunity for peace — peace for a country that has endured far too much violence for far too long. The past 13 years have been heartbreaking, but now there is a chance for a new beginning. It is incumbent upon all actors, including the Security Council, to seize this opportunity. This is a chance that simply cannot be missed. Denmark is fully committed to working to that end to support a Syrian-led political process that includes all parts of Syrian society and paves the way to a peaceful and stable future for all Syrians.

**Mr. Hwang** (Republic of Korea): I would also like to thank Special Envoy Pedersen and Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, Mr. Tom Fletcher, for their timely briefings and their tireless and dedicated efforts.

The choices we make today — big or small — will shape Syria's trajectory for decades to come. Thus, it is essential to think beyond the present crisis and make decisions that will stand the test of time.

I would like to make the following points in that regard.

First, all hostilities across the country must cease as Syria emerges from 14 years of brutal conflict. It is crucial that no party reignite hostility or deepen tensions for their parochial or short-sighted interests. On that note, the expansion of the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) beyond the demilitarized buffer zone and the Israeli Prime Minister's directive for the IDF to remain in Mount Hermon until at least the end of 2025 are concerning. Those actions mark the first occupation of a new Syrian territory since the 1970s, an explicit violation of the 1974 agreement and a blatant obstruction of the mandate of the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force, and place the Syrian caretaker Government in a difficult position as it strives to establish legitimacy at this critical juncture. Such Israeli actions against Syria must cease as soon as possible. Also worrisome is the continued fighting in northern Syria between the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) and the Syrian National Army, which undermines prospects for a peaceful and inclusive transition while offering Da'esh

space to manoeuvre to rebuild and recruit. We urge international actors to exercise influence over the parties to immediately halt the violence and seek a constructive and mutually acceptable solution.

Secondly, all relevant actors on the ground must prioritize actions to counter Da'esh's resurgence. Experts, including the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team of the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions 1267 (1999), 1989 (2011) and 2253 (2015) concerning Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals, groups, undertakings and entities, repeatedly warned of that threat last year, yet such warnings seem to have gone unheeded. SDF and the Syrian military facilities have been consistently attacked over the past month, weakening their ability to contain Da'esh. Meanwhile, reports indicate that Da'esh's resurgence in Syria has resulted in closer coordination with its international operatives beyond its border. Halting that cross-border threat must become an immediate priority for all concerned parties.

Thirdly, we urge the caretaker Government to align its ongoing transitional efforts with resolution 2254 (2015), which remains a cornerstone of the peaceful and inclusive transition of Syria. The collapse of the Al-Assad regime itself does not constitute the implementation of the resolution. Rather, it is merely a starting point. The main objectives of resolution 2254 (2015) — an inclusive transitional Government, a new constitution and free and fair elections for all Syrians — have yet to be fulfilled. We trust that those agreed-upon objectives will guide the actions of Syrians and others moving forward.

Fourthly, the international community must urgently double down on alleviating Syria's humanitarian and economic challenges with a long-term perspective. In that regard, we reiterate our support for the early recovery strategy announced by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs last year. We also welcome the recent United States general license for Syria, which will help ease the country's economic hardships.

At the same time, despite the recent scaled-up aid and unimpeded cross-border operations, Syria's crippled economy and devastated infrastructure is compounded by the recent return of internally displaced persons and refugees. Recognizing the call of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees on all States to respect the principle of non-refoulement at all times, we hope that the international community's enhanced engagement on early recovery implementation will lay a favourable foundation for the safe and voluntary return of Syrian refugees.

In conclusion, the Republic of Korea reaffirms the importance of the United Nations in facilitating an inclusive Syrian-led political process. We look forward to a successful national dialogue organized by the caretaker Government in due course.

**Mr. Fu Cong** (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): First of all, I wish to thank Special Envoy Pedersen and Under-Secretary-General Fletcher for their briefings. At present, the situation in Syria is at a critical stage with daunting challenges. The international community should strengthen its solidarity and coordinate its actions to support and help Syria achieve stability and development.

I would like to make four points.

First, China supports a Syrian-led and Syrian-owned political process in accordance with the spirit and principles of resolution 2254 (2015). The international community must effectively respect Syria's right to pursue a path of development in line with its national conditions and allow the Syrian people to decide their country's future based on their will. China notes that the National Dialogue Conference scheduled for 5 January has been postponed. We expect the Syrian parties to start the process of achieving an open and inclusive political settlement in the long-term

interests of the country and its people. China supports a greater role for the United Nations and Special Envoy Pedersen in that process.

Secondly, no matter how the domestic situation in Syria develops, the bottom line of zero tolerance for terrorism must not change. The Council recently issued a press statement on the situation in Syria (SC/15943), making it clear that all countries should combat all terrorist organizations listed by the Council and deny safe haven for terrorists. It is reported that the Syrian army has recently granted senior positions to a number of foreign terrorist fighters, including the leader of the Islamic Party of Turkistan, also known as the Eastern Turkistan Islamic Movement, designated and listed as a terrorist organization by the Security Council. China expresses its grave concerns in that regard. We call on Syria to fulfil its counter-terrorism obligations and to prevent any terrorist forces from using Syrian territory to threaten the security of other countries.

Thirdly, Syria has one of the worst humanitarian situations, with more than 16 million people in dire humanitarian straits. In addition, prolonged illegal unilateral sanctions have further aggravated the suffering of the Syrian people. The international community should increase its assistance to Syria. The United Nations should play a coordinating role, speeding up the implementation of humanitarian projects and prioritizing the needs of the population in order to enable it to survive the winter. All parties in Syria should abide by international humanitarian law, cooperate actively with humanitarian operations and ensure humanitarian access and the safety of humanitarian personnel.

Fourthly, the international community recognizes that the Golan is occupied Syrian territory. Resolution 497 (1981) determined the legal status of the Golan region, making clear that Israel's occupation of the Syrian Golan is null and void. China reiterates that Syria's sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity should be respected, that the Council's resolutions on the Golan must be implemented and that the 1974 Agreement on Disengagement between Israeli and Syrian Forces should be observed.

In conclusion, I would like to reiterate that China has long pursued a policy of friendship and cooperation with Syria and has never interfered in Syria's internal affairs. We stand ready to continue working with the international community to promote a smooth transition in Syria and to enable it to gradually embark on the path of peaceful development.

**Mr. Žbogar** (Slovenia): I too want to thank Special Envoy Pedersen and Under-Secretary-General Fletcher for their briefings today.

Images of Syrians celebrating the start of a new chapter of their country fill us with hope. However, let us be clear — the wounds run deep and the stakes remain incredibly high, as we heard from the Special Envoy today. There is much work to be done, and every step forward is critical. Peace is never easy; it must be carefully built.

Allow me, therefore, to share some of our thoughts on the future of Syria.

First, the future of Syria should be inclusive. It must be based on a fully inclusive Syrian-led and -owned political process in line with the key principles of resolution 2254 (2015). All Syrian people must have an opportunity for their voice to be heard and considered. This new Syria must be for all Syrians. We therefore urge a United Nations-facilitated political process leading to credible, inclusive and non-sectarian governance. We continue calling for the full, equal, meaningful and safe participation of women and minority groups in peace and security processes and decision-making at all levels.

Secondly, the future of Syria must be safe and secure, as pockets of violence and conflict still persist. We call for full respect for international law, including

international humanitarian law and international human rights law. That includes any law enforcement operations. The fighting still witnessed in northern Syria must cease. We need a solution that protects everyone's security interests, including our collective security interest in fighting Da'esh. Syria cannot be used as a base for terrorism. Any remaining stockpiles of chemical weapons in Syria must be secured and safely destroyed. The same goes for explosive remnants of war, which continue to pose a high risk to human lives and livelihoods, including food security.

The sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity and unity of Syria must be respected. We remain deeply concerned about the situation in the area of separation. The 1974 Agreement on Disengagement between Israeli and Syrian Forces must be implemented in its entirety.

Finally, the future of Syria must be based on protection. Civilians, critical infrastructure and humanitarian facilities must be safeguarded, and unimpeded access to humanitarian aid granted. Providing conditions for safe and dignified life for all is of crucial importance. We welcome the scaling up of assistance in areas where conditions allow. We join the calls for additional international support for the efforts of the United Nations and humanitarian organizations.

We also call for respect and protection of human rights, in particular those of women, girls and minorities. With a high number of detained, abducted and missing persons, it is crucial that all Syrians know the fate of their loved ones. Answers for families of the missing will open a path to closure at an individual level and reconciliation at a societal level.

Another fundamental element of lasting peace is accountability. We welcome the recent visits to the country of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic and the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to Assist in the Investigation and Prosecution of Persons Responsible for the Most Serious Crimes under International Law Committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011, and call on all relevant actors to cooperate fully with those institutions. We also underline the importance of preserving evidence, including physical and digital records of former detention centres, and to protect grave sites, cemeteries and morgues.

Opportunities lie ahead as the process of shaping a new Syria finally begins to take place. We sense a wave of optimism and we welcome encouraging signals from the caretaker authorities. However, while statements may sound promising, the true value lies in the actions that follow.

**Mr. Alfaro de Alba** (Panama) (*spoke in Spanish*): My delegation thanks the presidency of the Council for convening this meeting, as well as Mr. Tom Fletcher, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, and Mr. Geir Pedersen, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, for their valuable and informative briefings.

Panama expresses its concern about the complex and evolving situation in Syria, taking note of the updates on the ground, especially regarding the dialogue process. We reiterate the urgency of putting an end to hostilities and stress that stability in Syria is essential to ensuring security and peace in the entire region.

Panama supports the efforts of the Special Envoy Pedersen and strongly supports a peaceful political transition led by the Syrian people, based on principles of inclusiveness and transparency, leading to a new constitution and free, transparent and fair elections.

We stress the importance of the sensible implementation of resolution 2254 (2015), above all, of its spirit and principles, with a view to achieving political reconciliation, stability and peace in Syria. Sustainable peace in Syria will be

possible only if it is built on an approach that reflects the aspirations and diversity of its people, respecting the cultural, religious and ethnic traditions that make up the social fabric of the country, recognizing and guaranteeing the rights of women and girls and their role in peacekeeping and the post-conflict reconstruction process and ensuring the inclusion of all communities in building their future.

Panama reiterates that the protection of civilians must be at the centre of any effort to resolve the conflict in Syria. We urge all parties involved to comply with their obligations under international humanitarian law, ensuring the protection of civilians from the effects of the conflict. Unrestricted access to humanitarian aid is critical to meeting the urgent needs of millions of Syrians affected by the conflict. Reconciliation and reconstruction in Syria will be possible only if the needs of all civilians are prioritized.

We express concern about the unstable situation in the area of operations of the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force, as noted in the report of the Secretary-General of 2 December 2024 (S/2024/875). Panama supports the Agreement on Disengagement between Israeli and Syrian Forces of 1974 and its full implementation and calls on all parties to respect the Agreement and to refrain from any activity that compromises the security of the Blue Helmets.

Panama stresses the importance, for international peace and security, of preventing non-State actors from gaining access to weapons of mass destruction. For Panama, the Chemical Weapons Convention is a fundamental pillar of the global efforts to guarantee collective security. We therefore fully support the work of the Technical Secretariat of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons and underscore the importance of guaranteeing the security conditions necessary for the organization to move towards the total elimination of the chemical weapons programme in Syria. Panama reiterates its support for the specialized bodies of the United Nations to advance in the search for detained and disappeared persons and in the collection of evidence. That process will be key to achieving justice and accountability, which will contribute to consolidating the political transition process.

Panama will continue to support inclusive and sustainable solutions that prioritize regional stability, the protection of civilians and respect for international law.

**Mr. Sekeris** (Greece): I would also like to thank Special Envoy Pedersen and Under-Secretary-General Fletcher for their detailed briefings. Their participation here sheds valuable light on the issue at hand.

Greece welcomes the fall of Al-Assad's authoritarian regime in Syria in what constitutes a watershed moment for the country and the region. However, the situation on the ground is fluid, and it comes with both opportunities and risks. Hopeful in the wake of that momentous development, Syrians deserve peace — a peace that must and can only be assured through an orderly and fully inclusive political transition towards a legitimate, representative and non-sectarian Government, based on democratic legitimacy, in the spirit of resolution 2254 (2015).

In line with its principles, Greece supports the unity, independence, territorial integrity and sovereignty of Syria. No effort should be spared to protect all affected civilians, including Christians and all religious minorities and ethnic groups, and safeguard Syria's rich cultural heritage and religious monuments. Greece also attaches great importance to guaranteeing the security and prosperity of the historical Greek Orthodox community in Syria, which also includes Greek citizens. Syria must demonstrate significant and tangible evidence of its willingness to work towards a smooth transition of power, to build State institutions in line with the principle of inclusiveness and to respect international humanitarian law. Any positive declarations or messages by the new authorities must be matched by concrete actions on the respect of minorities and human rights. We fully support the Special Envoy's

engagement and echo the messages he has conveyed to Syria in that regard. Greece stresses the importance of a Syrian-led, Syrian-owned fully inclusive political process, free of foreign interference — the only viable pathway to the permanent cessation of hostilities in the war-torn country. In that vein, we strongly encourage Syria to work with the Special Envoy, with the goal of producing a clear road map and a timeline for a political transition process and constitutional reform, in the spirit of resolution 2254 (2015).

Greece remains ever-vigilant regarding the increasing risks of the resurgence of Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant and other terrorist groups in the country, including the risk of foreign terrorist fighters in Syria and the wider region. Syria must also abide by all relevant Council resolutions regarding non-conventional weapons and cooperate with the international community, particularly on chemical weapons stockpiles. A key priority should be facilitating the safe and voluntary return of Syrian refugees to their homes, which they have craved for far too long and is a recognized priority of the international community. We fully support the efforts of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and all other related agencies of the United Nations system in that regard.

Let me also underline our deep concern for the potential regional ramifications of the recent upheaval in Syria, calling for all parties to practice self-restraint and respect international law and Syria's territorial integrity and sovereignty. We appeal to all actors in the region to contribute in a responsible and sincere manner to the stabilization and reconciliation efforts of the international community. It is also crucial that all regional stakeholders refrain from acts that could jeopardize the political transition in the country for the sake of their own foreign or domestic political goals.

Since the terrorist attacks of 7 October 2023, instability has swept through the Middle East with devastating global ramifications. As demonstrated by the Greek Prime Minister's visit to Beirut on 16 December 2024, we are ready to support our regional partners in this volatile environment, and we will continue to monitor closely regional developments and their potential impact on neighbouring countries, in particular Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq.

On a final note, Greece expresses its full support to the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force and the implementation of its mandate and calls on all parties to respect the 1974 Disengagement Agreement and fully abide by its terms.

Let me conclude by reiterating our steadfast commitment to the vision of a peaceful, prosperous and democratic Syria, to the realization of which we shall continue to contribute through our strong and long-standing ties with the Arab world and our regional partners.

**Mr. Akram** (Pakistan): We thank Special Envoy Pedersen and Under-Secretary-General Fletcher for their invaluable briefings to the Security Council this morning.

Syria is yet another fraternal country of Pakistan that has been ravaged by internal divisions and external interventions. Today Syria is at an important juncture in its history. The recent political developments offer the opportunity to restore normalcy, stability and peace in Syria. Yet, that will depend on ensuring a peaceful transition to a new governance structure that is inclusive and stable and ensures Syria's unity and territorial integrity.

I would like to make five points.

First, Pakistan welcomes the positive statements and assurances from the leaders and representatives of the new interim Government. They must be translated into policies and implemented in practice. Political inclusivity and representative governance should be achieved through a Syrian-led and Syrian-owned process,



based on the principles of resolution 2254 (2015), with the support of the Special Envoy and the Security Council.

Secondly, the international community and the Council must address the danger of terrorism within and from Syria, especially in view of the still-unsettled parts of the country. The antecedents of some of the groups and the reported presence of foreign fighters dictate caution. Any resurgence of Al-Qaida or Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham and their affiliated groups cannot be accepted. The Monitoring Team of the Sanctions Committee established pursuant to resolution 1267 (1999) should continue to follow and report on the situation. That would also provide the basis for the easing and eventual elimination of the Syria-related sanctions. The Council should also seek objective information on the alleged presence of chemical weapons or capabilities in Syria.

Thirdly, we must address Syria's massive humanitarian crisis immediately and unconditionally. Seventeen million Syrians — more than 70 per cent of the population — are in need of humanitarian support. More than 13 million Syrians have been displaced, 7 million internally and 6 million abroad. The recent escalations have further added to those needs, with more than 1 million people displaced in a few weeks' time. The United Nations humanitarian response plan, which is only 33.3 per cent funded, must mobilize all the resources required to meet the urgent needs of the Syrian people, including for the safe and dignified repatriation of Syrian refugees, notably the millions in Türkiye. We welcome the scaling up of the United Nations-led humanitarian operations, of which Under-Secretary-General Fletcher informed us today.

Fourthly, Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity must be restored. Israel's occupation of the Syrian Golan Heights is illegal and null and void, as declared by resolution 497 (1981). The Council must demand Israel's complete and full withdrawal from the Golan Heights. We strongly condemn Israel's further incursion into the area of separation established under the 1974 Agreement on Disengagement between Israeli and Syrian Forces and its attacks on peacekeepers of the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force. That incursion must end forthwith, and the safety and security of United Nations peacekeepers must be ensured. In that context, an immediate end to Israel's aggressive actions in Gaza and the wider Middle East is also essential for the stabilization of the situation in Syria and other parts of the region.

Fifthly, the international community should help the new Syrian authorities to revive Syrian institutions and implement plans for the early reconstruction of their devastated country. The necessary exemptions from sanctions should be issued to enable such reconstruction.

The role of the United Nations, especially the Security Council and the Secretary-General, will be indispensable to ensure effective action on all the aspects I mentioned of the challenges confronting Syria and its proud and resilient people.

**Dame Barbara Woodward** (United Kingdom): I would like to start by thanking Special Envoy Pedersen and Under-Secretary-General Fletcher for their briefings and for their teams' work in Syria.

I will make three points today.

First, as we mark the start of this New Year — the first in more than half a century without the Al-Assad family in power in Syria — this is a moment of hope for the future of Syria and the Syrian people. But rebuilding a country is not a place for quick fixes. Therefore, we call on all involved to focus on the opportunity to build a democratic State that is representative of Syria's rich diversity and to take the necessary steps to establish participation across all of Syria's society. We are encouraged by the new interim authorities' timelines for drafting a new constitution

and holding elections and national dialogue. We are encouraged by early engagement with the international community, and we call for continued cooperation with the United Nations throughout the transitional period.

Secondly, there is much to be done, as we have heard, in the short term to protect civilians and ensure that humanitarian aid reaches the 17 million people who need it. We call on all parties to stop activity that could lead to further escalation or suffering for the civilian population and to protect vulnerable displaced populations. Since the fall of Al-Assad, the United Kingdom has committed a further \$76 million to support vulnerable Syrians in Syria and across the region.

Thirdly, Syria must eliminate the chemical weapons that the Al-Assad regime used against its own citizens. Now is the moment to close the Syria chemical weapons file once and for all. We welcome the interim authorities' commitment to secure chemical weapons stocks and their commitment to engage constructively with the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) to fully declare and verify the destruction of Syria's chemical weapons. I encourage members of the Council to support cooperation between the interim authorities and the OPCW to ensure that those appalling weapons can never be used again.

In conclusion, we look forward to working together across the Security Council to support the Syrian people in moving towards a Syrian-led, Syrian-owned political transition leading to an inclusive, non-sectarian and representative Government.

**Mr. Dharmadhikari** (France) (*spoke in French*): At the outset, I would like to thank the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General, Mr. Geir Pedersen, and the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, Mr. Tom Fletcher, for their briefings.

The fall of the Al-Assad regime has created a historic opportunity to rebuild a Syria that meets the aspirations of the Syrian people. The legitimate expectations of Syrians are many: reconstruction and reconciliation, justice for the thousands of victims of the regime and prospects for a return to Syria for those who have been forced into exile. With that in mind, Mr. Jean-Noël Barrot, Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs, visited Damascus on 3 January, together with his German counterpart, Ms. Baerbock. The Ministers spoke with the de facto authorities, engaged in dialogue with civil society and visited Saydnaya prison. That visit attested to the horrors that the Syrian people have endured.

In the immediate term, the guns must be silenced throughout the entire country. That is essential in order to end the suffering of Syrians and to sustainably build the country's future. Fighting in the north-east must stop, and a solution must be found that preserves the security interests and rights of everyone, in particular Syrian Kurds, while respecting the territorial integrity of Syria. All civilians, including persons belonging to ethnic and religious minorities, must be protected. In parallel, it will be necessary to continue the fight against terrorism, particularly against Da'esh. It will be vital that the new Syria leave no room for extremism or terrorism. We have not forgotten that it is from Syrian territory that the 13 November 2015 Paris attacks were planned, and we know that terrorist groups continue to operate in the region. The greatest vigilance must also be exercised with regard to the spread of weapons, in particular those from the Syrian chemical programme. The fall of the Al-Assad regime offers us an opportunity to destroy those chemical weapons.

After decades of dictatorship and division, Syrians have high hopes for the future governance of the country. France calls for a peaceful and committed political transition, representing all Syrian opposition groupings and the de facto authorities, in the spirit of the main principles established by resolution 2254 (2015). All components of the Syrian people have the right to take part in debates on the future of their country. Syrian women must have their rightful place. The rights of people

belonging to different communities, and women's rights, must be protected and respected within the framework of the future constitution. Those are the messages conveyed by the French Minister and her German counterpart during their visit. The de facto authorities made positive commitments on that occasion.

The United Nations, with its expertise in peace and security, and in the spirit of resolution 2254 (2015), has a role to play in supporting the ongoing transition. In addition to facilitating the political process, the mechanisms set up in Geneva to combat impunity and track down missing persons will contribute towards accountability, an essential element of reconciliation.

As part of that transition process, France is ready to support the Syrian people, as it has always done since 2011. During his visit to Damascus last week, the Minister expressed our readiness to provide technical expertise to support the transition, including in constitutional matters and the fight against impunity. France will continue to provide humanitarian support to the Syrian people. It is vital that aid reaches all those who need it through all possible channels. Humanitarian actors must work safely, unhindered and in an atmosphere of full respect for international humanitarian law. Moreover, France supports the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees to support Syrian refugees who wish to return to their country, under dignified and safe conditions.

Lastly, France is following developments in the Golan Heights with concern. It calls on Israel to withdraw from the area and to respect Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity, as well as the Disengagement Agreement of 1974, which is binding on both Israel and Syria. France reiterates its full support for the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force, whose security and capacity for action must be ensured.

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

I have the honour to deliver this statement on behalf of the three African members of the Security Council, namely, Sierra Leone, Somalia and my own country, Algeria, as well as Guyana (A3+).

At the outset, we would like to thank Mr. Pedersen and Mr. Fletcher for their valuable briefings.

Syria, a land of timeless history and the cradle of civilizations, stands at a pivotal crossroads. Its people, having endured immense hardship for years, now aspire to build a future of hope and renewal, a future in which a united Syria thrives as a beacon of prosperity and inclusivity, while embracing all its citizens regardless of their background. We must support those aspirations. The A3+ firmly believes in the Syrian people's resilience and capacity to shape their own future and achieve prosperity and well-being. Reaching that goal will require firm commitments.

First, with the goal of inclusivity, we must maintain steadfast support for an inclusive, Syrian-owned and Syrian-led political process, under United Nations auspices, in line with the principles of resolution 2254 (2015). Building a brighter future for Syria requires the meaningful participation of all Syrians, especially women and youth.

Secondly, regarding Syria's unity, independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity, the A3+ remains steadfast in upholding those principles. We categorically reject any attempts to divide the Syrian nation or to annex any part of its territory or violate in any other way the country's sovereignty and territorial integrity. We continue to be gravely concerned about Israel's actions in the occupied Syrian Golan Heights and its incursions into other parts of Syria. We call for full adherence to, and respect for, the provisions of the 1974 Disengagement Agreement and for an immediate end to such incursions.

Thirdly, on non-interference, external interference will only heighten tensions and exacerbate Syria's challenges. The A3+ strongly urges all parties to respect the principles of national sovereignty and to refrain from unsolicited interference in the country's internal affairs.

Fourthly, under countering terrorism, instability is fertile ground for violence and terrorism, which would further destabilize the region. A resurgence of terrorism in this fragile country cannot be allowed. We call for decisive, coordinated action against terrorism in Syria, in close coordination with the national authorities.

Fifthly, with regard to United Nations involvement, the A3+ reaffirms its unwavering support for the efforts of the Special Envoy to contribute to a smooth and inclusive transition in Syria. We call on all actors to engage constructively with him in that vital endeavour, while demonstrating a shared commitment to Syria's stability and future.

After almost 14 years of devastating conflict, the Syrian people deserve the unwavering support and solidarity of the international community. The humanitarian situation in Syria remains catastrophic and demands urgent and unconditional attention.

The A3+ calls on donors to mobilize the necessary resources to fully fund the humanitarian response plan. In 2023, the \$4 billion plan was only 33 per cent funded — a level that is both unacceptable and unsustainable.

Recent developments, with more than 664,000 people newly displaced — 75 per cent of whom are women and children — underscore the need for enhanced efforts to facilitate their safe and dignified return home. The A3+ emphasizes the paramount importance of creating an enabling environment for the voluntary, safe and dignified return of Syrian refugees and internally displaced persons. That requires three things.

First, nationwide security must be ensured. The volatile security situation has led to the suspension of humanitarian operations in some areas. The A3+ reiterates its call for a comprehensive nationwide ceasefire.

Secondly, basic services must be restored. Without access to essential services, Syrians will not be motivated to return home. We urge all stakeholders to support the implementation of an effective early recovery strategy that provides the necessary resources for Syrian livelihoods.

Thirdly, the economic recovery must be accelerated. Syria's path forward requires renewed economic growth. While humanitarian aid is vital, it is not enough. The A3+ calls on the international community to facilitate Syria's recovery process, including by lifting unilateral sanctions that hamper economic progress.

The A3+ remains committed to advocating for a stable, united Syria, recognizing that its stability is essential for the broader region. To the international community, the A3+ sends this clear message: genuine collaboration and constructive dialogue are essential to achieving the new Syria to which its people aspire. To the Syrian people, we say: it is time to silence the guns and to work together for a brighter future for their country.

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*): It is our pleasure to see sisterly Algeria presiding over the Security Council. I would like to congratulate you, Sir, and your delegation on assuming the presidency of the Council this month. We are confident that you will conduct its work wisely.

We thank the United States delegation for conducting the work of the Security Council last month. I would like to once again congratulate Somalia, Pakistan, Denmark, Greece and Panama, which joined the Security Council this month, and to wish them success in their endeavours and efforts. I would also like to thank the outgoing members — Japan, Switzerland, Malta, Ecuador and Mozambique — for their efforts during their membership over the past two years.

I deliver this statement upon the instructions of the Government of Syria.

One month has passed since the dawn of freedom has broken in Syria. Syrians removed the shackles of oppression and reclaimed the freedom that they had been denied for decades. They regained their dignity and are now able to chart their own future and usher in a new era to achieve the hopes and aspirations for which they sacrificed so much innocent blood.

Today, following the victory of the revolution of the Syrian people, the revolution of freedom and dignity, Syria is entering a new era in its history in which all Syrians come together to build a State of freedom, equality and rule of law, to achieve prosperity and stability, to turn the page of oppression and suffering and human rights abuses. This phase requires that the international community support the Syrian people and their State in their quest to build a better future for their country.

There was recently a smooth transition of State institutions to the caretaker Government, which was established for a period to end by early March. The Syrian people have thus taken the first step on the right track by preserving State institutions and preventing their collapse, knowing full well what disastrous consequences such a collapse could lead to — as we have seen in other States. The caretaker Government is working to ensure security and stability, to meet essential needs and to provide essential services. It is preparing for a national dialogue conference to discuss the next phase and establish a transitional Government to oversee preparations for national processes, including the drafting of a new constitution and the holding of elections.

The Syrian authorities have underscored their commitment to preserve the independence, sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity of Syria. They have also expressed their willingness to build friendly relations with all United Nations Member States on the basis of mutual respect, constructive cooperation and shared interests, eschewing policies of polarization. The Syrian authorities have also stressed that the new Syria is willing to play a positive role in the international arena. It will contribute positively to the promotion of international and regional peace and security and will not engage in any conflict or war. Syria calls on Member States to respect the will of the Syrian people and its national choices and to support State institutions and their efforts to restore safety, security, stability and prosperity to the society.

For that reason, external actors must not interfere with the political process. Foreign actors must not also seek to achieve gains that are not in line with the interests of the Syrian people and their country. All actors must refrain from making statements and taking actions that could foment discord and chaos or threaten civil and social peace in Syria. That must cease immediately.

In that context, Syria would like to express its appreciation to all States that have expressed their support for the Syrian people and their will, sent their delegations to Damascus, contacted the new Syrian leadership, received the Syrian Government's delegation and provided support and assistance to the Syrian people in this very critical moment. Syria affirms that today it is beginning a new chapter of its history — a bright chapter in Syria's foreign relations, in support of prosperity and security and stability in the region.

Syrians have suffered for many years, and it is time for them to breathe a sigh of relief and live a dignified life, as do other peoples of the world. It is high time to end the

suffering and enable the Syrians to live in security and prosperity, to live a dignified life in their country and to build a better future for their country. We therefore call on the United Nations and its Member States to immediately and fully lift the unilateral coercive measures imposed on Syria; to provide the necessary funding to meet the humanitarian needs; restore basic services, especially electricity; support early recovery, livelihoods and sustainable development projects; rehabilitate and reconstruct damaged infrastructure and service facilities; clear mines and explosive remnants of war; and provide an environment conducive to the dignified return of displaced persons and refugees to their cities and homes. In that context, the Syrian Arab Republic notes that the United States of America has expanded its exemptions from the unilateral coercive measures imposed on Syria and calls on it, along with other countries, to fully lift those measures imposed on the Syrian people, as they were originally directed against the former regime and its criminal elements.

Syria believes in the partnership with the United Nations and its Member States and is committed to promoting cooperation with it to improve the living and humanitarian conditions of all Syrians, provide them with basic services and realize their aspirations to build a present and a future worthy of Syria's heritage of civilization, the blood of its martyrs and the sacrifices of its people.

Syria emphasizes the need to ensure that the Israeli occupation entity does not take advantage of the current circumstances to violate Syria's sovereignty and attempt to impose a new reality through its military incursions into additional areas of Syrian territory in Jabal al-Shaykh, Qunaytirah governorate and surrounding areas.

Syria stresses the need to compel Israel to respect the 1974 Agreement on Disengagement between Israeli and Syrian Forces and the relevant Security Council resolutions, in particular resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 497 (1981), to ensure the withdrawal of Israeli forces from the areas they have recently entered, put an end to their aggressive practices against the people of those areas and ensure respect for the mandates of the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization and the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force.

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

**Mr. Mahmoud** (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): I have the honour to deliver this statement on behalf of the Group of Arab States.

We thank you, Mr. President, for convening today's meeting, and we thank the briefers — Mr. Geir Pedersen, the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, and Mr. Tom Fletcher, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator.

Syria is undergoing a historic transformation that will have repercussions, not only for our brothers in Syria but also for the entire Middle East region. For over 13 years, the Syrian people have suffered a humanitarian tragedy that they did not deserve. It has led to infighting, violence, occupation, attempts to divide its territory, internal and external displacement and the spread of terrorist groups and economic repercussions that pushed the majority of Syrians below the poverty line. Today Syria is facing a serious challenge related to a political process and a transitional phase that must not be taken lightly. We must all make sure that the process is safe, smooth and functions properly, providing full support to the Syrian people.

The Arab Group reaffirms the full support of the Arab countries for the Syrian people and their commitment to ensuring that the current era is a starting point for a bright future. We would like to make the following points with regard to our firm position on this crisis.

First, the Arab Group reaffirms that the Arab countries never abandoned Syria during its past plight and that its current support did not emerge in the spur of the moment but reflects sincere intentions towards the Syrian people. The Arab States have made great efforts in the past through a number of frameworks, including the Arab Liaison Committee, to promote political reform in Syria, bridge the differences among the parties and urge the former regime to respond to the demands for change in order to stop the infighting and the bloodshed and to protect Syria and its unity. The Arab States have also contributed to providing humanitarian support to the Syrian people over the past years, especially during the 2023 earthquake crisis, and hosted our Syrian brethren and welcomed them in their second homes. We reaffirm that the Arab countries continue to strongly support the current political process on its right track, as that is our duty and the right of the Syrian people. They are part of our region and are our brothers and sisters.

Secondly, the Arab Group reaffirms the sovereignty, territorial integrity, unity and independence of Syria. We condemn the ongoing Israeli occupation of the Syrian Golan, which has been occupied since 1967, and its opportunistic exploitation of the current situation to occupy more Syrian territory and bomb Syrian cities, facilities and infrastructure. That is a flagrant violation of international law, the Charter of the United Nations and the 1974 Agreement on Disengagement between Israeli and Syrian Forces. We call on the Security Council to intervene to maintain peace and security, stop the Israeli aggression and put an end to the Israeli occupation. We also demand an end to the illegal presence of all foreign forces in Syria.

Thirdly, the Arab Group stands in full solidarity with Syria and its people in this historic moment. We will continue to support efforts to rebuild the State through a comprehensive exclusively Syrian-owned and -led political process that includes all segments of the Syrian people and their national authorities. That process aims to ensure the active participation of all Syrians in building a better future for their State and to set up Syrian national institutions, with the support of the League of Arab States and the United Nations, pursuant to the spirit and principles of resolution 2254 (2015), so that Syria can regain its natural standing.

We also reaffirm that drafting the process will take place only when the destructive external interventions are halted. All national parties in Syria must give precedence to the interests of the Syrian people, above all other considerations, in order to guarantee the security, unity and sovereignty of Syria, to put an end to terrorism and to preserve the rights of the Syrian people, without exception.

Fourthly, the Arab Group condemns the activities of terrorist groups that seek to exploit the current void. It is important to strengthen all efforts to combat terrorism given that it is an international risk that threatens the stability of the international community as a whole.

Fifthly, the Arab Group calls for further efforts to address the current humanitarian crisis in Syria in order to provide humanitarian aid to the Syrian people, including by cooperating with relevant United Nations agencies. We also call for supporting reconstruction and for providing the necessary political, living and humanitarian conditions to begin the voluntary, safe and dignified return of Syrian refugees and internally displaced persons, in addition to providing all necessary support, in cooperation with the relevant United Nations agencies. We also call for the mobilization of the resources of United Nations mechanisms, including the humanitarian response plan for Syria, which is still very underfunded.

In conclusion, the Arab Group reaffirms its position of supporting and not abandoning Syria. The security of Syria is a cornerstone of our Arab national security that we all work to maintain and protect in the same way as we do that of our own

countries. We will continue to stand with the Syrian people until they achieve their aspirations to realize a stable and prosperous country as soon as possible.

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

**Mr. Iravani** (Islamic Republic of Iran): I extend my heartfelt congratulations to Algeria on assuming the presidency of Security Council this month. I also warmly congratulate the newly elected Council members — Denmark, Greece, Pakistan, Panama and Somalia — on their election. Additionally, I take this opportunity to express my appreciation to the outgoing elected members — Ecuador, Japan, Malta, Mozambique and Switzerland — for their dedicated and commendable efforts during the two-year tenure on the Council. We thank Special Envoy Pedersen and Under-Secretary-General Fletcher for their insightful briefings.

On the ongoing situation in Syria, I wish to make the following points.

First, the Islamic Republic of Iran reaffirms its steadfast commitment to Syrian sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity. Decisions about Syria's future must be made exclusively by the Syrian people, free from any external interference or imposition. Iran advocates for the formation of an inclusive Government through free and fair elections and a comprehensive national dialogue that ensure the representation of all ethnic, political and religious groups. We strongly believe that the principles and mechanism outlined in resolution 2254 (2015) are essential and applicable to Syria's current situation. A key priority is the drafting of a new constitution that will serve as the foundation for future Syrian governance. The timeline specified in resolution 2254 (2015) is both practical and achievable. Any delays in this process risk deepening internal divisions and further destabilizing the country. Iran fully supports the efforts of Special Envoy Pedersen to that end and commends his active engagement in advancing this critical objective.

Secondly, Iran's presence in Syria has been legal, aligned with international law and carried out at the request of the former Syrian Government. Iran participated in an advisory capacity in order to combat terrorism, aiming to prevent insecurity from spreading throughout the region. Similarly, Iran's withdrawal from Syria has been conducted in a responsible manner, with careful consideration of the potential impact on the Syrian people. Nevertheless, achieving peace, stability and security in Syria, ending foreign occupation and ensuring a Syria free of terrorism remain the cornerstones of Iran's foreign policy towards the country.

Thirdly, Syrian people continue to endure severe economic and humanitarian challenges. With nearly 1.1 million people, mostly women and children, displaced since 27 November, according to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), humanitarian activities have resumed in areas where security conditions allow. Yet access remains critically restricted in parts of north-eastern Syria due to movement constraints. Iran commends the tireless efforts of OCHA and humanitarian partners in alleviating the suffering of the Syrian people. Rebuilding critical infrastructure, restoring essential services and facilitating the safe return of refugees and displaced persons are essential steps towards recovery. Equally important, the extraterritorial and unilateral sanctions imposed by Western countries on Syria are unjust and illegal and must be lifted immediately. Exploiting the situation in Syria to impose political conditions and undermine Syrian sovereignty, in exchange for sanctions relief, severely harms the most vulnerable populations and violates the fundamental rights of the Syrian people.

Fourthly, Iran emphasized the imperative of respecting the rights of all minorities in Syria, including Alawites, Shiites and Christians and ensuring the protection of diplomatic personnel and premises in accordance with international law. Similarly, safeguarding Syrian religious sites and cultural heritage is vital for preserving the



country's identity and unity. All actions must fully adhere to international law in order to ensure the safety and rights of all communities.

Fifthly, the resurgence of terrorism in Syria, particularly the covert operations of sleeper cells linked to Al-Qaida and the Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham, remains a serious and escalating concern. Those terrorist groups retain the potential to reconnect and reignite terrorism across the region. Compounding the crisis is the presence of more than 60 armed groups, including foreign terrorist fighters with divergent and often conflicting agendas, which had deepened instability and pose a severe threat to both regional and global security. The fate of the thousands of fighters affiliated with the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant, held in camps and prisons in north-eastern Syria, is a pressing challenge that demands urgent action. Those individuals must be swiftly repatriated to their countries of origin, in accordance with their nationality, and subjected to legal proceedings so as to ensure accountability. Iran remains steadfast in its commitment to combating international terrorism and stands ready to collaborate with legitimate international partners to address that critical challenge.

Sixthly, Israel remains the most significant threat to Syria's present and future. The occupying regime is continuing its violations of Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity, including its military aggression and ongoing occupation of Syrian territories. It is also defying resolution 497 (1981) by refusing to withdraw from the occupied Golan Heights. With support from the United States and exploiting Syria's situation, Israel has expanded its occupation by occupying more than 500 additional square kilometres of Syrian territory and systematically destroying nearly all of Syria's military and research infrastructure. Those actions flagrantly violate international law, the Charter of the United Nations and the relevant Security Council resolutions. The Council must take decisive action to halt those violations and hold Israel accountable for its destabilizing actions.

Lastly, Iran's friendly relations with Syria are rooted in decades of shared history and strong political and cultural ties and continue to deepen based on mutual interests and adherence to international legal principles. Iran remains committed to playing a constructive role, collaborating with the United Nations, regional partners and the Government of Syria — which represents the will of the Syrian people — to achieve lasting peace and stability in Syria and the broader region.

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

**Mr. Albanai** (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, it is my honour to deliver this statement on behalf of the States of the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf (GCC): the United Arab Emirates, the Kingdom of Bahrain, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the Sultanate of Oman, the State of Qatar and my own country, the State of Kuwait.

We would like to express our support for the statement made by His Excellency the Permanent Representative of the Arab Republic of Egypt on behalf of the Group of Arab States. We also congratulate you, Mr. President, on your assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for this month, underscoring our absolute readiness to support you and your team to ensure your presidency's success. We hope that the Algerian presidency will contribute to further United Nations activity to shed light on the current challenges in the Middle East and the entire world. I would like to wish the new members of the Council luck and success. I would also like to thank Mr. Geir Pedersen, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, and Under-Secretary-General Fletcher for their briefings.

In late December 2024, the GCC countries held the forty-sixth extraordinary meeting of the Ministerial Council in Kuwait to follow up on developments in Syria and Lebanon. They reiterated the need for Syria to be secure and stable. We decided

to participate today only to reaffirm our determination to help Syria at the political, economic, development and humanitarian levels. The GCC countries would like to emphasize the following three basic principles for dealing with the Syrian crisis.

First, we must respect Syria's sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity, reject foreign interference and combat terrorism, extremism and radicalization, while respecting religious and cultural diversity.

Secondly, we must support the comprehensive and inclusive political transition and the national reconciliation efforts aimed at rebuilding the State and encouraging national unity and inclusive dialogue with the participation of all parties and components of the Syrian population in order to achieve a Syrian-led political process with the support of the United Nations.

Thirdly, we emphasize that the stability of Syria is a key pillar of the security of the Middle East. The GCC States also affirm their categorical rejection of the repeated attacks by the Israeli occupation forces against Syria, and we call for their immediate withdrawal from the occupied Syrian territory. We reiterate our position that the Golan is a Syrian territory, and we condemn Israeli settlement expansion operations in the occupied Golan. We call for the lifting of economic sanctions on Syria and for humanitarian support to be provided for the brotherly Syrian people.

In conclusion, the GCC States affirm their determination to support Syria, take the hand of the brotherly Syrian people and stand with them at all levels. We also reaffirm that we stand ready to support you, Mr. President, and your team in facilitating the work of the Council this month and helping to maintain international peace and security.

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

**Mr. Yıldız (Türkiye):** I would also like to thank Special Envoy Pedersen and Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator Fletcher for their briefings, and I express my wish to work closely with them in the future.

While the end of the Al-Assad regime brings hope for the Syrian people and the region, the challenges ahead remain immense. Years of unimaginable suffering and widespread destruction have left Syria in ruins. The material devastation, the regime's grave human rights violations and the severity of the humanitarian crisis are evident. We must ensure accountability for the human rights violations and uses of chemical weapons by the Al-Assad regime. Türkiye continues to support the efforts of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons to investigate and hold accountable those responsible for those chemical attacks.

In the light of the dramatically changed dynamics in Syria, it is imperative that we adapt our approaches to meet the pressing needs of the Syrian people. The international community must adopt a constructive approach and facilitate a smooth transition in Syria. It is now time to address the Syrian people's urgent expectations for international support in rebuilding their country. The events of the past month underscore that a "wait-and-see" approach is no longer viable. Swift and concrete action is needed across multiple areas to restore normalcy to Syrians' daily lives. Beyond humanitarian aid, there is an urgent need to build capacity for public services and critical infrastructure. They are essential for the functioning of State mechanisms, alleviating the suffering of Syrians and facilitating the voluntary return of displaced Syrians from abroad.

It is time for us, the international community, to shift our focus from exclusively providing humanitarian aid to actively supporting Syria's stabilization, early recovery and reconstruction. We also believe that it is time for the Security Council to seriously consider the removal of sanctions and delisting measures. Recovery and

reconstruction efforts cannot proceed without decisive action in that regard. We welcome the general licence recently issued by the United States as an important first step, but it is imperative that the scope of exemptions be expanded and time restrictions eliminated.

We have all reaffirmed our collective resolve to uphold Syria's territorial integrity and national unity, and Türkiye has actively worked to do so for a long time. There is no place for terrorist organizations, such as the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK)/ People's Protection Units (YPG) and Da'esh, in Syria. Türkiye remains committed to preventing the resurgence of Da'esh, which seeks to exploit the current situation. We must also dispel the illusion that the YPG/Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) is separate from the PKK, which is targeting the territorial integrity of Türkiye and Syria. The rebranding efforts of the PKK have failed. There can be no peaceful and prosperous Syria while the PKK continues to occupy significant portions of Syrian territory. The PKK's control over natural gas and oil resources must end, and those resources must be returned to their rightful owners: the Syrian people. Eliminating terrorism is a prerequisite for building the institutions of a peaceful and politically united Syria.

Israel's continued military operations on Syrian territory are deeply concerning. Such actions violate Syria's territorial integrity and undermine efforts to stabilize the region. The international community must take concrete action to address those unlawful acts. Türkiye stands firm in its commitment to ensuring a stable, unified and secure Syria for the benefit of both the Syrian people and the region as a whole. We consistently emphasize the importance of inclusive governance in our engagements with the new Syrian Government. Our expectation is that the new Administration will adopt an inclusive and pluralistic approach, while preserving Syria's rich social fabric and adopting a constitution that guarantees basic rights and freedoms. Those messages must continue to be conveyed through constructive engagement. The new Government requires the support of the international community to fulfil its promises and to meet the expectations of its own people. We urge all Member States to engage with Syria's new Government and to support efforts to stabilize the country, eliminate the terrorist threat and strengthen Syria's economy. Delaying those essential steps poses the risk of a missed opportunity to consolidate the stability that has been achieved.

Since the first day of the Syrian conflict, Türkiye welcomed and embraced the Syrian people and saved lives by the millions. As acknowledged by the United Nations, Türkiye's facilitation of cross-border humanitarian operations in Syria has been a lifeline. For its part, Türkiye will continue to play a key role in restoring normalcy for the brotherly people of Syria. We will spare no effort in supporting the rebuilding of Syria's institutional, economic and physical infrastructure.

In conclusion, throughout the past 14 years, Türkiye, with its unique position on a 900-kilometre border with Syria and with its deep cultural ties to the brotherly people of Syria, always stood with the aspirations of the people and hosted countless migrants, brothers from Syria. At times, Türkiye has taken that stance at the expense of its own relations, even with its allies. But now we are at a point from which we can collectively look to the future. I hope that the Council will play a stronger role in the future. My country is ready to cooperate with all Council members in that regard.

**The President:** There are no more names inscribed on the list of speakers. I now invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion on the subject.

*The meeting rose at 12.25 p.m.*