

June 14th 2022

The United Nations Security Council has until July 10 to renew the Syria cross-border resolution, which authorises the UN to deliver life-saving aid to millions of Syrians in need. 31 NGO leaders are calling on the Security Council to renew the resolution for a period of 12 months.

Excellencies,

Next month, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) will vote on a matter with direct consequence on the lives of over 4 million people dependent on humanitarian aid in northwest Syria. The UN's cross-border response, enabled by this Council, is a humanitarian and economic lifeline for Syrian families struggling to survive after more than a decade of conflict. The Council must ensure it continues for another 12 months.

Needs across Syria are rising at record speed and are at record levels. This year more Syrians are at risk of hunger than at any other point in the past eleven years of conflict. Converging crises and economic shocks including drought, inflation, economic collapse among Syria's neighbors, and the COVID-19 pandemic have compounded an already dire humanitarian situation. As a result, today more than 14.6 million Syrians are dependent on humanitarian aid to survive, including 4.1 million people living in the northwest who are largely reliant on cross-border humanitarian assistance to meet their basic needs.

Should the UN's cross-border operation end in July, the subsequent disruption and reduction in aid flows to the northwest will prove devastating for those already at great risk.

In 2021, the UN-led cross-border response allowed humanitarian actors to reach over 2.4 million people per month in the northwest. This includes food for 1.8 million people, nutrition assistance to 85,000, education for 78,000 children, and access to life-saving dignity kits for 250,000 women and girls. It has also proved critical to the delivery of medical items and supplies needed to provide lifesaving health services and respond to COVID-19, and to increase people's resilience to cope with adverse weather conditions.

While progress has been made on cross-line access to the northwest, it is not currently a viable alternative to cross-border assistance. Since the adoption of Resolution 2585 in July 2021, a total of four cross-line deliveries have reached the northwest and each one has provided assistance to less than 50,000 people. When compared to the 2.4 million people reached each month via cross-border operations, it is clear that the scale and frequency of cross-line assistance falls woefully short at a time when humanitarian needs are the highest they have ever been and look set to rise further.

The magnitude of the crisis demands the reauthorisation of cross-border assistance for a minimum of 12 months. Anything less would signal to Syrians that the Council is willing to accept unnecessary suffering and loss of life.

Humanitarian realities on the ground must drive Security Council action on the UN cross-border response in Syria. The reality is that over 70% of the population in northwest Syria are food insecure and the prices of essential food items have increased by up to 67% in the last three months, driven in part by the conflict in Ukraine. We are concerned that over one million people dependent on food baskets delivered by WFP will be left without food assistance by September 2022 should the Council fail to reauthorize the cross-border mechanism, as NGOs and other aid modalities cannot scale up to cover the gaps.

This means more parents forced to choose between skipping meals or sending their children to work; more girls forced into early marriage to provide income for food; and more children forced out of school.

The fragile health response is also at risk. Many healthcare facilities are already struggling to provide adequate support. Supplies and funding from UN agencies enabled by the cross-border mechanism are a lifeline for health centres currently supporting over 4 million Syrians through the direct provision of essential vaccines, medicines and medical equipment. During the latest spike of COVID-19, WHO shipped over 350,000 vaccine doses into the northwest. This would have been impossible to secure if cross-border access was not available. Lessons must be learned from the Council's decision to restrict the UN's access through the removal of the Al Yarubiyah crossing point in the northeast, which had a critical impact on the health response at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Finally, the successful scale up of early recovery and resilience activities, in parallel to continued emergency aid, will likely be dependent on renewal of the cross-border mechanism. Positive progress has been made on early recovery modalities in the past 12 months by donors, NGOs and the UN seeking to increase livelihoods opportunities and the restoration of basic services. In the event of a non-renewal, the Syria Cross-Border Humanitarian Fund, which has provided \$18.1 million of its 2021 allocation for early recovery activities, a three time increase from last year, will cease to function, putting at risk the progress made to date. Anything less than a 12-month renewal will also undercut early recovery activities which need at a minimum 12 months to begin to see results.

The Security Council came together in 2014 to authorise cross-border humanitarian access, one of its few moments of unity in relation to this conflict. The imperative then, as it is now, was to ensure that aid reaches Syrians in a principled manner wherever they are, based on needs alone. There is no rationale for reducing humanitarian access at a time when both more people than ever need life-saving assistance and when there is no viable alternative. More, not less, access across all modalities is needed.

Yours sincerely,

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