



Security Council

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Letter dated 4 August 2020 from the President of the Security Council addressed to the Secretary-General and the Permanent Representatives of the members of the Security Council

I have the honour to enclose herewith a copy of the briefings provided by Mr. Mark Lowcock, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, and Ms. Amany Qaddour, Regional Director of Syria Relief and Development, as well as the statements delivered by the representatives of Belgium (on behalf of Belgium and Germany), China, the Dominican Republic, Estonia, France, Indonesia, the Niger, the Russian Federation, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, South Africa, Tunisia, the United States of America and Viet Nam, in connection with the video-teleconference on the situation in the Middle East (Syria), convened on Wednesday, 29 July 2020. A statement was also delivered by the representative of Turkey.

In accordance with the procedure set out in the letter dated 2 April 2020 from the President of the Security Council addressed to Permanent Representatives of the members of the Security Council (S/2020/273), which was agreed in the light of the extraordinary circumstances caused by the coronavirus disease pandemic, the briefings and statements will be issued as an official document of the Security Council.

(Signed) Dian Triansyah **Djani**
President of the Security Council



Annex I**Statement by the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, Mark Lowcock**

I will focus today on four main areas: first, the support that humanitarian agencies are delivering to people across Syria; secondly, the economic situation and its humanitarian consequences; thirdly, the protection of civilians; and, fourthly, funding for the humanitarian operation.

Humanitarian aid operations across Syria are reaching an average of 6.8 million people each month. The economic crisis is deepening poverty and pushing more people into humanitarian need. In all, 4.6 million people are receiving monthly food assistance, more than 8.9 million medical procedures have been conducted and more than 1.6 million children have received help with their education.

With the adoption, on 11 July, of resolution 2533 (2020) to extend authorization for United Nations cross-border aid delivery into north-west Syria, we are working to address the operational challenges arising from the Council's decision.

The United Nations is also helping tackle the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) in Syria. The problem is now country-wide — cases have now been confirmed in all but one of Syria's governorates, and United Nations staff working in Syria have also been struck by the disease.

The number of confirmed cases remains in the hundreds, a relatively low level. The true number of cases is certainly higher, as the limited testing capacity, compared to what is available in neighbouring countries, and a reluctance among some people to acknowledge the infection masks the real scale of the outbreak.

My second point today is on the impact of the economic downturn. The Syrian economy, devastated by nearly a decade of conflict, has entered a period of extreme fragility, marked by exchange-rate volatility, high inflation, dwindling remittances and lockdown measures to contain COVID-19. The economy is expected to contract by more than 7 per cent this year.

Initial estimates suggest that, due to job losses in recent months, unemployment has risen from 42 per cent last year to close to 50 per cent today.

Remittances from abroad, a lifeline on which many Syrians depend, have fallen. Estimated remittances from Gulf States alone are now \$2 million a day, down from \$4.4 million in 2017, and \$7 to \$12 million in 2010.

After falling to its lowest recorded informal rate in June, at 3,200 Syrian pound to the United States dollar, the pound has been regaining value, but so far that has not translated into price reductions and the cost of essentials continues to rise.

Market monitoring by the World Food Programme recorded a 48 per cent increase in the average price of a standard reference food basket between May and June. Food prices are 240 per cent higher than in June last year. That means that families across the country can no longer afford the very basics, as clearly reflected by food security and nutrition indicators.

In addition, some 9.3 million people are food insecure and more than 2 million are at risk of becoming food insecure. In all, 86 per cent of households say they are buying lower quality food or less food or skipping meals. In some parts of the country, recent surveillance data show that chronic malnutrition among children under 5 years old is now at 29 per cent, as compared to 19 per cent around this time last year.

My third point is on the obligation to respect and protect civilians. The ceasefire reached in March in the north-west between the Russian Federation and Turkey is largely holding, but some air and ground-based strikes have been reported in recent weeks. The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights recorded at least five civilian deaths, including two children, and 26 civilians, including seven children, injured as a result of shelling and air strikes this month. Another 34 civilians were killed, including 15 children, and at least 98 were wounded by attacks using improvised explosive devices in residential areas and local markets, and in incidents involving landmines and explosive remnants of war.

We are also monitoring with concern the increased level of violence and attacks in Dara'a.

In Rukban, the lack of regular humanitarian assistance or basic service access has created a critical situation for the 12,000 people thought to remain there. I reiterate the urgency of delivering assistance to the remaining civilians and of supporting continued voluntary departures.

In the north-east, the water supply from the Allouk water station was again disrupted this month, affecting 460,000 civilians in Al-Hasakah governorate. Low water levels in the Euphrates River are adding to the water shortages and disrupting the electricity supply.

Among the areas affected and facing significant water shortages is Al-Hol camp, which accommodates around 65,000 people. Children make up two thirds of the camp population and more than half — 35,000 children — are under the age of five. Aid agencies need better access to the camp to help those children.

Let me conclude with some words on the funding situation for our humanitarian operations. On 30 June, the fourth Brussels pledging conference resulted in total pledges of \$7.7 billion, of which \$5.5 billion was pledged for 2020. Those pledges covered funding for humanitarian, resilience and development activities in Syria and across the region. The highest amounts were pledged by the European Commission, Germany, the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, Japan, Norway, the Netherlands, France and Denmark.

The humanitarian response plan for Syria, with a funding requirement of \$3.4 billion in 2020, is 32 per cent funded halfway through the year, making it one of our better funded operations. I would like to thank donors for their generous contributions, without which we would be unable to help people throughout Syria. I also urge others to contribute so that the financial burden is shared more fairly.

Another \$384 million is needed for Syria under the COVID-19 Global Humanitarian Response Plan, of which 28 per cent has been received. In my statement to the fourth Brussels conference, I urged donors to give greater priority to education in their pledges. The education requirement in the humanitarian response plan for Syria is currently just 24 per cent funded.

I want to reiterate my appeal to invest in the education of Syria's children. A third of school-aged children in Syria — 2.5 million children — are out of school. Another 1.6 million are at risk of dropping out of school. The number of out-of-school children has increased by 16 per cent since last year. With school closures due to COVID-19, that number is very likely to increase further.

I briefed the Council last month (see S/2020/635) on thousands of school children crossing, or attempting to cross, lines of control to take their national exams. Amid simultaneous and seemingly insurmountable crises, they are not losing sight of their future. Neither should we.

Annex II

Statement by the Regional Director of Syria Relief and Development, Amany Qaddour

I thank you, Sir, for inviting me today, and I thank the members of the Security Council for having me.

I am here today on behalf of Syria Relief and Development, a humanitarian agency that has operated on the ground since 2011— almost since the start of the crisis — and we have had both the privilege and the responsibility to serve Syrians, predominantly through health, protection and shelter programming. We have seen the evolution of the crisis play out over the last nine years, now approaching 10. We see that many Syrians have been forced to live a life without dignity out of the sheer desperation they face. What I am hoping to highlight today, on behalf of the people we serve, are a few key points.

First and foremost I want to express our concern about the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic — essentially, a crisis within a crisis — in addition to some of the underlying health implications and, ultimately, the key operational challenges we face and how this environment has affected our ability to respond to people's needs.

In the context of COVID-19, we are being challenged in an entirely new way. I do not think that is specific to Syria; we see more advanced nations struggling to respond effectively due to the vicious and infectious nature of the virus. We know that Syria is even more vulnerable. Its health system has become quite fragile, the economy has deteriorated, with many being on the brink of starvation, there is mass displacement and some of the most extreme weather we have seen lately across the region, including severe heat waves, flooding and snowstorms — as we saw last winter and certainly anticipate this year, too. Those conditions serve as the backdrop and have shaped the COVID-19 response, due to the constant need to plan around uncertainty.

As an example, we have an incredible partnership with the World Health Organization (WHO), where we serve as the lead agency for the infection prevention and control pillar under its emergency task force, along with many other vital actors in this health response. Despite those tremendous efforts, challenges remain due to the nature of the response in Syria. That includes shortages of ventilators, intensive care unit beds and personal protective equipment. In addition, hundreds of thousands of people — if not millions — are living in precarious conditions in inadequate homes or shelters. Those conditions simply do not allow for proper social distancing and self-isolation, or hygiene measures, for that matter.

It is difficult to impose some of those preventive guidelines, particularly when there are multiple families in the same collective shelter or in very crowded areas like Al-Dana and Azaz, for example, where the priority may not be the pandemic, but rather the ability to earn a living to bring home food. I think we see that across the country — whether in Idlib, in the north-west, or in Homs, Al-Hasakah or Damascus. Cases are on the rise, and we know that pandemics do not respect geographic boundaries. What is also concerning is that many of these cases, particularly in north-west Syria, are health-care workers. In a region that is already dealing with a shortage of skilled workers, human-resource capacity is critical for an effective response.

I think that particular point truly highlights how the fragmented health sector and infrastructure, in general, have contributed to the tremendous needs, both from a health standpoint and in terms of other key services, because we know that

negative health outcomes do not emerge in a vacuum. That is why, beyond the initial focus in the early stages of the crisis on trauma and emergency services, there has been a massive expansion of the definition of life-saving services and a push for strengthening health systems.

I know that has been a huge focus for Germany in particular, with the investment of the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit GmbH in the health directorates, as well as for other donors to the health sector, including the United States Agency for International Development, the Department for International Development, and the European Union. In our case — and I say this as both a humanitarian and a public health practitioner — we need to look at health care on a continuum and include provisions for primary and community health, rehabilitative care for those with disabilities and, of course, mental health, given the immense traumas many have endured and the rise in depression, post-traumatic stress disorder and suicidal ideation.

That applies to both the people we serve and the aid workers who deliver those services. That is why we see such an obligation to protect our aid workers, considering that they have been exposed to the same conditions of displacement, violence and insecurity. That is something we put on our partners and the Security Council itself — to share that risk with humanitarian agencies so that the risks are not simply passed down to the people who have already absorbed a great deal of risk and, in many cases, actually sacrificed their lives in the process. That was the case of Dr. Hassan Al-Araj of the Hama Health Directorate, and Imad Zaytoon, who worked at our hospital in Oweijel. They both died very tragic and violent deaths.

Another large part of risk-sharing is facilitating access for service provision. The most recent cross-border resolution has certainly impacted that level of access. Coordination and access have both been key parts of the response, and the inability to access certain areas via a rapid mechanism through Bab Al-Salam — which is critical for the work we do — means that we are now further burdening our aid workers to deliver those more distant and harder-to-reach areas. We will not abandon those populations, but many may be on the verge of being inaccessible. That is why we have to keep those communities at the forefront.

Beyond service delivery, I would like to emphasize in particular the coordination mechanism, key partnerships and technical guidance from agencies like WHO, the United Nations Population Fund, UNICEF and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, among other key bodies. Their work has been essential in this collaborative response, and that has been the distinguishing factor in this region.

I did not emphasize health services specifically for women and girls in the health-care continuum and the impact of coronavirus disease. That is because I would like to give singular and explicit attention to that group, which has endured some of the most harrowing circumstances with regard to neglect of their health and ongoing exposure to sexual and gender-based violence.

This past year, when thousands were displaced and our own aid workers were on the move, we saw women — or rather girls, owing to the practice of early marriage as one of the most extreme forms of coping for families and girls who lack education and simple means for ensuring a livelihood — give birth outdoors, under trees, without access to health care. It is tempting to blame such practices on social or cultural norms, but I ask Council members to consider the complexity and deeply rooted factors that have led to and culminated in these practices. We see this phenomenon in many contexts, and it is something we struggle with at a global level, but it is most visible in the context of conflict. I therefore earnestly ask that

the Council address the need to provide life-saving services, including the response to these forms of violence.

With regard to some of the fundamental issues I have highlighted today, I would like to conclude by emphasizing the need for humanitarian services, ongoing access and the prioritization of humanitarian needs above all else to be sustainable, particularly because the decisions made in the Security Council Chamber have shaped the lives and fate of millions.

Annex III

Statement by the Permanent Representative of Belgium to the United Nations, Marc Pecsteen de Buytswerve

I make this statement on behalf of Germany and Belgium, the humanitarian co-penholders of resolution 2533 (2020). We would like to thank Under-Secretary General Lowcock for his briefing. We also thank Ms. Amany Qaddour for describing the challenges a humanitarian non-governmental organization faces on the ground serving people in need in desperate circumstances.

Some 11 million Syrians continue to be in need of humanitarian assistance and protection. These needs are growing and becoming more acute. On the one hand, years of war, mismanagement and oppression, as well as the economic crisis in neighbouring Lebanon, have resulted in an economic crisis in Syria. This situation has increased pressure on the humanitarian needs across the country and led to an additional 1.4 million people becoming food insecure over the last six months.

Furthermore, we are extremely concerned about the spread of coronavirus disease across the country. Over the last week, as Mr. Lowcock mentioned, the number of cases has increased significantly. Across the country, testing capacity remains incredibly low, so most cases may go unnoticed. The destruction of health facilities and the shortage of health workers further endanger any response. It is therefore incredibly frustrating that while growing needs must be met, humanitarian access is increasingly being limited.

Since 2014, cross-border operations have offered the Syrian people a lifeline, allowing the United Nations and its implementing partners to ensure life-saving assistance from across the borders. Although there were changes on the ground and cross-line access to certain areas has improved, the cross-border mechanism is as needed today as it was six years ago. Following the recommendations of the Secretary-General, we have worked tirelessly to continue to ensure maximum humanitarian access, both from inside Syria and from across its borders.

The closing of Al-Yarubiyah in January defied humanitarian arguments, and now the closing of Bab Al-Salam once again contradicts humanitarian logic. While 13 members of the Security Council supported renewed access through two border crossings in the north-west of the country, two members vetoed such renewal at the beginning of this month, not even accepting a transition period of a mere three months for Bab Al-Salam. The current situation will result in a more costly and riskier humanitarian operation in the north-west and frustrate timely access to the region north of Aleppo.

Meanwhile, the gaps in medical access in the north-east that were left after the Al-Yarubiyah crossing point was closed at the beginning of this year are still far from being filled. Mr. Lowcock has just confirmed that many health-care stations do not receive what they urgently need to treat patients and fight the virus. The burden of responsibility therefore lies with those countries that have systematically limited the cross-border modality for humanitarian access. Let us be clear: member States that vetoed the proposed draft resolutions are voluntarily putting human lives at stake out of political motives. Meanwhile, at the recent fourth Brussels conference, together with other European member States, the humanitarian co-penholders have reconfirmed their support for non-politicized humanitarian aid.

Sadly, protection issues persist, not only for those in arbitrary detention or who are missing, but also for those who become victims of air or ground offensives. We call on all parties to show maximum restraint and consider the humanitarian repercussions of any military actions. While we condemn the recent attacks by

terrorist groups, we still wish to emphasize that any response to those attacks should comply with obligations under international law, in particular with obligations under international humanitarian law.

Finally, a political settlement in line with resolution 2254 (2015) is the only way to put Syria back on track towards peace. There is no justice without accountability. The humanitarian co-penholders fully support the conclusions of the Secretary-General's board of inquiry, the work of 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 the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, as well as justice initiatives on national and international levels. We continue to see immense value in the humanitarian notification system, and we underline once again that parties that withdraw from this mechanism nevertheless continue to be bound by international humanitarian law.

Annex IV**Statement by the Permanent Representative of China to the United Nations, Zhang Jun**

I thank Under-Secretary-General Lowcock for his briefing. I also listened carefully to Ms. Qaddour's briefing.

China is closely following the humanitarian and economic situation in Syria. We are deeply worried that the country is now going through a severe economic collapse. The loss of currency value, rising unemployment, increased food insecurity and insufficient medicine supplies all add to the suffering of the Syrian people. Saving the Syrian economy is fundamental to saving more lives and preventing a more severe humanitarian crisis.

The fact that unilateral sanctions gravely impact the humanitarian situation in Syria is undeniable. Years of economic blockade and illegal sanctions have worsened the socioeconomic and humanitarian situations in the country and undermined the livelihoods of innocent civilians. At this critical time, unilateral sanctions further compromise the capacity of Syria to effectively respond to the coronavirus disease pandemic. Lifting unilateral sanctions is more important and urgent than ever.

Secretary-General Guterres, Special Envoy Pedersen and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) have made repeated appeals for waiving unilateral sanctions. These appeals have also received overwhelming support of States Members of the United Nations. There should be a positive response to these appeals.

China urges relevant countries to demonstrate genuine sympathy and support for the Syrian people by trying to alleviate the suffering they are imposing on them. We do not believe that the so-called humanitarian exemptions can justify their actions or make the situation any different on the ground. The Security Council should fulfil its mandate and take concrete steps in this regard. We also request a comprehensive report by United Nations Secretariat on this issue.

The international community should increase humanitarian assistance to the Syrian people, on the basis of respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Syria. In this regard, China's position on the cross-border mechanism remains unchanged. Considering the current situation, we do not object to retaining the cross-border mechanism at this stage. We note that since the adoption of resolution 2533 (2020), United Nations agencies have been making full use of Bab Al-Hawa. We have learned that, according to OCHA, it has been possible for this crossing point to handle the increased deliveries.

We reject the irresponsible comments made by the representatives of the United States and other countries with respect to China. China has always adopted a constructive and responsible approach in dealing with the cross-border issue. In fact, it is the United States that should reflect on its own behaviour. When addressing the cross-border issue, the United States voted six times against reasonable draft resolutions and amendments aimed at narrowing differences and finding solutions.

If the United States truly cares about the humanitarian situation in Syria, it should stop politicizing the humanitarian issue and cease its hypocritical political show. If the United States truly cares about the humanitarian situation in Syria, it should immediately lift unilateral sanctions against the Syrian people, instead of creating groundless excuses. If the United States truly cares about the humanitarian situation in Syria, it should stop its policies of hegemony and regime change and its bullying practices in the Middle East and other parts of the world, which have led to endless chaos and instability.

We reiterate that the Syrian Government should always bear the primary responsibility to improve the humanitarian situation in Syria. It is encouraging to see continued efforts and progress in cross-line operations into both the north-east and north-west of Syria. China calls upon relevant parties to remove obstacles to cross-line operations and give priority to providing humanitarian relief from within Syrian territory. We appreciate the efforts of humanitarian workers on the ground, guided by the principles of humanitarian emergency assistance as set out in General Assembly resolution 46/182.

The Syrian issue should be addressed through a holistic approach, taking into account the political, counter-terrorism, security, humanitarian and other aspects all together. China calls upon relevant parties to respond to the ceasefire appeals by the Secretary-General, strengthen dialogue and consultation, and actively promote a Syrian-owned and Syrian-led political process. China will continue to play a responsible and constructive role in the efforts aimed at achieving a peaceful, just and proper settlement of the Syrian issue at an early date.

Annex V**Statement by the Special Envoy to the Security Council of the Dominican Republic, José Singer Weisinger**

I thank Under-Secretary-General Mark Lowcock for his briefing. I would also like to welcome Ms. Qaddour to the Security Council and acknowledge, through her, the critical work humanitarian organizations are doing on the ground despite the many challenges and the growing dire humanitarian needs.

As the coronavirus disease pandemic slowly makes itself present in Syria, we remain concerned about the poor capacity of the country's health-care system to respond to it. Doctors and health-care workers have had to flee their country as a result of 10 years of conflict. The conflict in Syria is one that has not only destroyed critical infrastructure, but also emotionally devastated millions of people.

At the same time, the options to effectively assist the Syrian people in the most effective and direct ways have been critically undermined. The closure of the Bab Al-Salam border crossing pushes the difficulties of delivering humanitarian assistance to the north-west of the country to very extreme limits. The closure decision was inappropriate in the light of the immense challenges and enormous suffering that persists in the area.

Indeed, the current situation on the ground, with its compounding, coexisting crises, paints a sombre picture for the Syrian people. An alarming 9.3 million — and soon many more — are food insecure. In practical terms, that means that families are skipping meals, parents are not eating well enough, and children are not getting the nutrition and regular meals they need to grow up healthy. These people simply cannot afford to be food secure. It is not a matter of food scarcity, but a matter of food prices.

The effects of the conflict, which is at the core of all this suffering, are increasingly harsh on the civilian population: from the humanitarian needs to the economic hardships, it is they who are paying the highest price. And yet, a credible, negotiated, political solution facilitated by the United Nations is not on the horizon in the short term. The only way to assist civilians in coping with the different crises they are dealing with is through increased and sustained humanitarian assistance using all feasible modalities.

We have heard the call from non-governmental organizations working in Syria for this Council to urgently reauthorize access through the United Nations border points they were previously authorized to use. They are already seeing the impacts of decreased access, which could worsen even further in coming weeks and months. They are the ones responsible for the transportation and delivery of assistance. It is their staff, mostly Syrians, who are exposed to security risks and increased costs while trying to scale up and fill the gap for the closure of the crossing I just mentioned — not to mention the mobility constraints due to the pandemic or even the potential increase in hostilities in the area.

The Dominican Republic believes that this is not the time to discuss anything other than how to meet the dire humanitarian needs of the Syrian people. This includes a complete ceasefire and an impulse to the political process through the full implementation of resolution 2254 (2015).

Let us remember that, while we are here, hearing each other's statements and blaming one another for the failure of humanity that we have let ourselves fall into, there are millions of people going hungry and hundreds of thousands of children receiving no education, protection or health services. Many more are arbitrarily

detained or in overcrowded camps. All of them are subject to a pandemic that could ultimately take their lives.

And since this is the last public meeting under your presidency, Mr. President, I would like to congratulate you and your team on delivering such successful and fruitful results this month. It has been a pleasure.

Annex VI

Statement by the Deputy Permanent Representative of Estonia to the United Nations, Gert Auväärt

We thank Under-Secretary-General Lowcock and Ms. Qaddour for their comprehensive briefings. As a long-time member of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs Donor Support Group, Estonia appreciates the Office's work in mobilizing humanitarian assistance to all people in need.

This work is even more important in the light of rising number of coronavirus disease (COVID-19) cases in Syria. Testing remains low, which means that actual infections are probably much higher. Most vulnerable to the virus are those people in overcrowded internally displaced persons camps across the country. Unimpeded humanitarian access to these areas is crucial for an effective response to the COVID-19 outbreak and people's needs.

In the light of recent Council's meetings, I want to use this opportunity to take a closer look at the socioeconomic situation inside Syria. We note that, mistakenly, the issue of sanctions is also sometimes raised in this context. However, there is no evidence that European Union sanctions in any way hinder Syria's socioeconomic situation or the humanitarian response in the country. Instead, we must look at the ongoing conflict and the root causes of instability in Syria.

First, the war has destroyed Syria's physical infrastructure. The Syrian regime's deliberate bombing of civilian facilities over the course of nine years has led to substantial damages in various sectors, including health and education. Furthermore, trust in Governmental institutions remains low. In the international Corruption Perceptions Index, Syria ranks 178 out of all countries observed. Elites in and around the Syrian regime have continued to enrich themselves. At the same time, 6 million people endure displacement within the country.

The final issue is lawlessness resulting from warlordism. Rogue military commanders, Shabiha networks, as well as Iranian-linked militias — the presence of all these adds to the insecurity. We see this clearly in southern Syria, where Syrian Government has controls but communal violence, forced disappearances and kidnappings remain widespread to this day

In conclusion, the damage to Syria's social fabric and the collapse of its economy are nothing more than the net result of these factors. International sanctions have nothing to do with it.

Annex VII**Statement by the Permanent Representative of France to the United Nations, Nicolas de Rivière**

[Original: English and French]

First of all, I would like to thank Mark Lowcock and Amany Qaddour for their briefings.

As has been pointed out, the humanitarian situation in Syria continues to deteriorate. The coronavirus disease pandemic, rising food insecurity and the economic crisis resulting from corruption and disastrous management by the regime are increasing humanitarian needs every day.

The top priority must be the establishment of an immediate cessation of hostilities and a humanitarian pause, in accordance with resolution 2532 (2020) and the Secretary-General's call. This is all the more essential as the pandemic is spreading, including in the north-west, where the Russian-Turkish truce remains fragile. In this regard, we condemn the deadly attacks of 20 and 26 July near Azaz and in Ras Al-Ayn.

Respect for international humanitarian law is non-negotiable; it is an obligation for all parties. I am thinking in particular of the protection of civilians and civilian infrastructure. France will continue to give its full support to mechanisms to combat impunity.

All parties, in particular the Syrian regime, must ensure humanitarian access. France regrets the closure of the Bab Al-Salam crossing point, which provided vital access for 1.3 million people in the Aleppo region. We also regret the lack of consensus within the Security Council to reopen Al-Yarubiyah crossing point, at a time when the spread of the pandemic makes the delivery of medical aid to the north-east even more essential. The politicization of humanitarian aid in Syria is unacceptable. Cross-line aid is largely insufficient to meet the needs. It offers none of the necessary guarantees of impartiality and transparency.

The European Union and its member States, whose financial mobilization represents 70 per cent of the commitments made at the fourth Brussels Conference on supporting the future of Syria and the region, will continue to insist on the application of the humanitarian principles of neutrality, impartiality and independence and of the principles-and-parameters document, defined by the United Nations, in order to provide the necessary guarantees for the implementation of the assistance provided to the populations in need in Syria.

Finally, I would like to recall that, until a credible political process in accordance with resolution 2254 (2015) is firmly under way, France and the European Union will not finance reconstruction. Our positions on the lifting of sanctions and normalization also remain unchanged. Let us not be misled by the fable of the regime — the economic crisis in Syria is the result of the regime's destruction of its own country. European sanctions are targeted; they target individuals and entities that participate in the repression and profit from the fallout of the conflict. They provide strong mechanisms to safeguard the delivery of humanitarian and medical aid. This instrumentalization of the sanctions issue is completely unacceptable.

Annex VIII

Statement by the Deputy Permanent Representative of Indonesia to the United Nations, Muhsin Syihab

We thank Under-Secretary-General Mark Lowcock for his briefing and Ms. Qaddour for sharing the information with us.

My delegation is deeply concerned with the wave of suffering that is currently hitting the Syrian people. Economic collapse, food insecurity, increased unemployment, with businesses shutting down and the spread of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19), are worsening the humanitarian situation in Syria, not to mention the security situation in various areas of the country.

We therefore once again urge all parties in Syria to uphold their obligations to protect civilians and civilian infrastructure and to ensure a period of sustained calm during this critical time, particularly by respecting the call for a ceasefire throughout the country.

During this challenging time, military action will not help those families who are struggling for food. And during this challenging time, provocative rhetoric will certainly not help internally displaced persons and other vulnerable groups in need of water and medicine.

Allow me to highlight the following points.

First, there is an urgent need to suppress the spread of COVID-19 in Syria, while increasing the necessary health capacity. It is indeed troubling to hear reports of increasing cases and that the level of testing capacity remains low. More cases have been identified in north-western and north-eastern Syria. Displaced people, the elderly and other vulnerable groups living in crowded camps face higher risk.

We appreciate the precautionary measures taken to contain transmission of the virus, while these can also complicate and increase humanitarian need due to restrictions on movement, commercial activities and education services.

This is a very delicate situation, indeed — a situation that needs continued support from the international community. We must also not forget the high demand for water in north-eastern Syria, where the Allouk water station has been disrupted many times, affecting the water supply of thousands of people living in the area, including Al-Hol camp. Again, timely, secure and unimpeded humanitarian access must be guaranteed by all relevant parties in this regard.

Secondly, there is a need to maximize the Bab Al-Hawa crossing. We note that the closure of the Bab Al-Salam border crossing might result in a more costly and less effective humanitarian response. My delegation therefore encourages strong coordination among all relevant parties to guarantee the uninterrupted delivery of increased humanitarian aid through Bab Al-Hawa.

Thirdly, I turn to the importance of ensuring the safety of humanitarian workers. With the complex situation on the ground, we sometimes overlook the high risk faced by these courageous men and women. Despite the difficult circumstances, the United Nations and its humanitarian partners continue to provide life-saving assistance to millions of people in need in Syria. We thank them and salute their dedication and commitment. We urge all parties in Syria to safeguard aid workers, as required under international law.

Indonesia believes that the Security Council, despite contrasting positions within it on this issue, has one common objective, and that is to save lives. We must

always base our actions and decisions on that key objective — a genuine and pure humanitarian goal.

Before I end my statement, let me, on behalf of my delegation, extend our utmost appreciation to Ambassador Marc Pecsteen de Buytsverve for his constructive and significant contribution to our collective work in the Council. We wish him all the very best in his next assignment in Geneva.

Lastly, let me also congratulate you, Sir, and your team on having successfully presided over the Council during the month of July. We hope we will have a smooth sailing in August, certainly with your constructive and cooperative support.

Annex IX

Statement by the Deputy Permanent Representative of the Niger to the United Nations, Aougui Niandou

I would like to begin by thanking Mr. Mark Lowcock, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, and Ms. Amany Qaddour, Regional Director of Syria Relief and Development, for their briefings.

I also wish a warm welcome to the representatives of Syria and of Turkey.

The increased hostilities and violent incidents observed over the past two weeks, particularly in north-western Syria, are a source of concern for us. The air strikes, shelling and use of explosives have resulted in several civilian casualties, including women and children. This new type of threat adds another layer to the psychological trauma of the population living in these areas.

My delegation strongly condemns the recent attacks using improvised explosive devices. We call on all warring parties in the Syrian conflict and on external actors to take tangible steps towards the full cessation of hostilities, in keeping with the Secretary-General's call regarding the necessity to observe a global humanitarian ceasefire.

However, the Niger would like to reiterate that the fight against terrorism is equally important as the fight against the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. Whether in the Sahel or in Syria, we should not allow terrorist groups to take advantage of the current situation to resume and step up their deadly activities in the light of the huge sacrifices made by the international coalition to defeat them in Syria and Iraq.

As the days pass, the humanitarian situation in Syria becomes more and more worrisome. The combination of the effects of a protracted conflict, the COVID-19 pandemic and the current economic downturn has rendered the situation even harder for the population, which had already been living in difficult conditions. The Niger commends humanitarian agencies for their daily efforts to deliver much-needed assistance to the most vulnerable population throughout Syria and for their ability to adapt to the shifting conditions on the grounds.

From the briefings we just heard, the work of the humanitarian agencies in Syria is crucial more than ever as the COVID-19 pandemic is now spreading across the country. As of 27 July, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) reported some 650 cases in Syria, including 23 in the Idlib and Aleppo governorates. We salute the excellent work of humanitarian agencies to help put in place the minimum critical capacity for the testing and treatment of cases in health centres in those restive areas. Even though difficult to implement in such an environment, precautionary measures, such as social distancing and hygiene, will be critical to containing the spread of the virus.

To conclude, the current economic downturn and the devaluation of the Syrian pound have resulted in a steep rise in the price of food, medicine and other goods. According to OCHA, the price of one month's worth of food for a family increased by 120 per cent between March and June 2020. This price volatility has exacerbated the already weak purchasing power of numerous Syrian families.

We reiterate our call for a humanitarian lifting of all unilateral economic measures that might hinder the Government's ability to effectively fight the pandemic and complicates the delivery of humanitarian assistance. The devastating consequences of the collapse of the Syrian economy is affecting Syrians

indiscriminately and could further burden the relief efforts, as more and more families will be turning to aid to meet their basic needs. As the humanitarian crisis deepens, there is an urgent need to take the necessary steps to guarantee access to food, essential medical supplies and medical assistance around the country, in keeping with resolution 2533 (2020).

Annex X**Statement by the Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation to the United Nations, Vassily Nebenzia**

We thank Under-Secretary-General Mark Lowcock for his briefing and we listened carefully to Ms. Amany Qaddour's presentation. I would also like to wish Mr. Pecsteen de Buytsverve all the best in his new assignment in Geneva.

Next time, we would like to hear information on the repositioning of the United Nations humanitarian deliveries to the north-west of Syria in accordance with the new format of work under the cross-border mechanism. We would be interested to receive more details in the future and hope that the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) will be able to organize the second United Nations inter-agency mission to that part of the country so as to conduct a first-hand assessment of the situation on the ground. Since the beginning of the year, many changes have taken place in the north-west, and those need to be reflected through reliable information.

With regard to the difficulties the United Nations is facing in accessing the territories previously supported through the Bab Al-Salam border crossing, we have the following question. As the board of inquiry revealed, some armed opposition groups in north-western Syria have signed a declaration of commitment on compliance with international humanitarian law and humanitarian assistance under OCHA's auspices, and the declaration helped to structure the engagement of humanitarian actors with armed opposition groups. We want to learn more about the declaration, cooperation with those armed groups, how fruitful the cooperation is and how it helps OCHA facilitate the provision of humanitarian assistance to the north-west of Syria, especially under new technical circumstances. We believe that it is the right of donors to expect a degree of accountability as to the effectiveness of their financial resources in terms of the final beneficiaries of the humanitarian aid.

We expect that by the next Security Council meeting on the humanitarian situation in Syria we will see progress in cross-line assistance to the north-west — but not only to the north-west. It is high time to engage fully with the Syrian authorities on increasing cross-line deliveries throughout the country. We also expect OCHA to report to us on what measures will have been undertaken in this regard.

We once again want to draw attention to the fact that cross-line deliveries of humanitarian aid are growing, and that should be properly acknowledged. On 4 July, the World Health Organization provided a new cross-line supply of humanitarian aid by road to the province of Al-Hasakah. In total, since the beginning of 2020, when Al-Yarubiyah was closed, more humanitarian aid has been delivered to the north-east of Syria than in previous years, including through the aforementioned border-crossing. It is a fact that speaks for itself. At the same time, humanitarian deliveries, approved by the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic, go both to areas and medical facilities under its control and to those managed by the Kurdish authorities. It proves that the Syrian Government observes the principle of non-discrimination in the provision of humanitarian assistance. That fact should not be perverted in an attempt to blame Syrians for their reluctance to cooperate openly and fruitfully.

In the north-east, aside from the situation in Al-Hol camp, we are seriously concerned about the high risks of environmental disaster that would impact the overall humanitarian situation and the well-being of the people living there.

During the Council's meeting last week on Syria (see S/2020/743), we mentioned already the news spreading in the media about the oil spills. Such spills from the Al-Rmeilan oil field alone have amounted to 60 barrels per day for the

last two years. A total of 50,000 barrels have already leaked into the environment. From a damaged storage facility, oil is getting into nearby streams, poisoning the Euphrates. According to experts, it is an ecological time bomb, not only for Syria but also for Iraq. As a result, the area to the east of the Euphrates — a well-known granary of Syria — cropland is decreasing and harvest volumes are falling each year. The negative consequences on human health are also obvious; the number of miscarriages and birth defects — including haemophilia, anaemia and hypothyroidism — acute respiratory and oncological diseases, meningitis and skin inflammation has increased sharply.

It is noteworthy that the United States, which is occupying Syrian oil fields, does not provide either financial or technical assistance to solve that problem. Some 100,000 barrels are being produced per day, amounting to \$30 to \$40 million a month, yet nothing is being done to protect the environment.

We regret that despite the obvious relevance of this topic to today's discussion, our request to have an additional briefer from the Secretariat was not treated appropriately. Such reluctance raises a lot of questions and may force us to ask for a separate video teleconference on this topic.

The responsibility for the humanitarian situation in Syria lies with those countries that deliberately and discriminately introduce unilateral coercive measures and sanctions against Syria and pretend that this does not have any effect on the lives of ordinary Syrians. In addition to the deepening shortages of food and medicine in local markets and growing inflation, which undermines the purchasing power of ordinary Syrians, such requisition of national resources undermines the ability of the legitimate Government to overcome the socioeconomic crisis. We find this approach inhumane and hypocritical.

We must register our dissatisfaction with the way the co-penholders conducted the extension of the cross-border mechanism. They put their interests above the Security Council's common interests, thereby making us struggle for over a week, and enjoyed seeing us exercise our veto instead of ensuring a swift adoption of the resolution. We also regret that our Western colleagues chose to ignore the obvious; the increase in cross-line assistance and the need to speed up efforts to make cross-line operations more effective in reaching all parts of Syria. The same applies to mentioning the need to assess the impact of unilateral coercive measures in the Secretary-General's reports. The French Ambassador today referred to resolution 2532 (2020), which mentions the appeals and calls of the Secretary-General. However, they failed to concur with it in the resolution that we adopted on the cross-border mechanism. That is again an example of double standards.

Some of our colleagues would rather sacrifice the resolution itself than have these important clauses included in it. I agree — accountability will come. However, those who may be held accountable in the end may not be those whom some consider to be the usual suspects. Not all is measured in American dollars, but we regularly — almost on a daily basis — provide bulletins on what we send to Syria in humanitarian assistance. I hope the members read the bulletins from time to time. But what is more important is that we have been saving the country from those who were or are still trying to ruin Syria, including from the outside, as some here once did with Libya. With one hand they provide humanitarian assistance; with the other they are trying to strangle the country. Those members' reassurances that it does not affect ordinary people convince no one. At least, they do not convince us or Syrians.

Annex XI**Statement by the Counsellor of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines to the United Nations, Diani Jamesha Prince**

I thank Mr. Lowcock and Ms. Qaddour for their briefings.

The humanitarian needs in Syria are enormous and increasing, and the cross-border mechanism continues to serve as an essential component in the provision of life-saving humanitarian assistance. For this reason, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines reaffirms its support for resolution 2533 (2020). More than ever, there is an urgent need to effectively scale up cross-line deliveries to fill the gaps that now exist. Humanitarian assistance should never be politicized, and we encourage all parties to engage constructively on this matter to ensure that no one is deprived of aid.

We take note of the 30 June fourth Brussels conference on supporting the future of Syria and the region. We support meaningful dialogue aimed at improving Syria's humanitarian situation and welcome the announcement of financial pledges for both Syria and the region. However, we must remain mindful that discussions focused on Syria ought to include the participation of the Syrian Government and we must give due consideration to their perspectives.

Syria's humanitarian emergency has been made worse by the country's rapidly declining economy. Millions are now food insecure, and access to the most basic commodities is severely constrained. The grave threat of the coronavirus disease pandemic further compounds the socioeconomic challenges. The country's health-care system has been crippled by a decade of war and is incapable of withstanding a major outbreak. We yet again appeal to countries who have imposed unilateral coercive measures on Syria to forgo this course of action to afford the country a fair chance at confronting the current challenges. We further encourage the international community to contribute to Syria's reconstruction efforts to assist the overall recovery.

We remain concerned by the numerous interruptions in the operations of the Allouk water station. We urge all parties to work together to ensure the sustained flow of water to the hundreds of thousands of civilians, residing in overcrowded camps and informal settlements, who are heavily dependent on its supply.

Once again, we underscore the importance of preserving the ceasefire in the north-west and of establishing a lasting nationwide cessation of hostilities. Conflict takes lives, destroys critical infrastructure, forces displacement and disrupts the delivery of aid. We therefore urge all parties to exercise maximum restraint. Further, we remind them of their obligations under international humanitarian law and international human rights law when conducting operations aimed at eradicating the scourge of terrorism.

The Syrian people continue to pay the highest price of the conflict. The humanitarian situation is at its worst, and there will be no respite in the absence of a political solution. We encourage all parties to continue working together towards accomplishing the shared goal of restoring peace and stability in the country.

Before closing, we would like to join with others in congratulating the Federal Republic of Germany on a successful presidency. We would also like to thank Ambassador Pecsteen de Buytswerve for his valuable contributions to the work of the Security Council and wish him the very best of luck in his new appointment in Geneva.

Annex XII**Statement by the Permanent Representative of South Africa to the United Nations, Jerry Matthews Matjila**

Let me begin by thanking the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, Mark Lowcock, for his frank briefing on the humanitarian situation in Syria. We also thank the Regional Director of Syria Relief and Development, Amany Qaddour, for her briefing.

Reports of increased security incidents and airstrikes in various pockets of Syria are of great concern to South Africa. While South Africa welcomes the general maintenance of the ceasefire agreement in the north-west of Syria, reports of the use of improvised explosive devices, landmines, air and ground strikes and of incidents involving explosive remnants of war cannot be ignored, especially given the resulting injury and death of civilians, including women and children.

South Africa again calls on all parties to the conflict to respect their obligations under international human rights and international humanitarian law regarding the protection of civilians and civilian infrastructure, such as schools, health facilities and water reticulation facilities. South Africa recommends that such facilities be regarded as neutral by all parties to the conflict. The continued loss of civilian life is unacceptable.

These continuing security incidents and violence have a direct impact on the socioeconomic and humanitarian situations in Syria. The deteriorating economic environment has seen a significant impact on the daily lives of Syrians, with over 9 million people food insecure, and many households are engaging in negative coping mechanisms in order to make ends meet. These negative coping mechanisms are having a destructive psychological impact on civilians who have already been devastated by nine years of violence, resulting in injuries, deaths and the detention of loved ones.

The deteriorating economic circumstances in Syria are having a direct impact on the already dire humanitarian situation. South Africa therefore reiterates its call for the immediate lifting of all unilateral sanctions currently being imposed on Syria, especially given the growing spread of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) throughout Syria.

With the rising number of COVID-19 cases, it is important that humanitarian response efforts be focused on preparedness and response planning to minimize the potential impact of COVID-19 on the vulnerable refugee and internally displaced person (IDP) populations. Testing, especially in locations susceptible to the spread of the virus, such as detention centres and formal and informal refugee and IDP camps, is essential in that regard.

South Africa is concerned by the impact of the reduction in humanitarian border crossing points. We welcome the extension of the humanitarian border crossing at Bab Al-Hawa for 12 months, as this is the only way that essential humanitarian assistance is currently being delivered to north-western Syria. The 12-month mandate renewal will also allow the United Nations humanitarian agencies and parties the necessary time to adequately plan and prepare for their important and continued efforts.

In view of the reduction of the cross-border assistance mechanisms, the focus must turn towards the improvement and enhancement of the cross-line assistance mechanisms. The scaling up of cross-line assistance is essential to close the gap in humanitarian assistance resulting from the closure of the Al-Yarubiyah and Bab Al-Salam border crossings. In that regard, we also reiterate our call for the safe,

unimpeded and impartial delivery of humanitarian aid and assistance to all who require it, in line with the provisions of international humanitarian law.

I have a question for Mr. Lowcock. Given the dire economic and humanitarian situation, as he mentioned in his statement, and the increasing needs, especially for children, women and those with disabilities, does Syria have oilfields and, if so, where are they located, who controls them and why is he unable to use the proceeds from the oil that is produced for the relief agencies to assist the Syrian people?

In conclusion, we reiterate that the situation in Syria can be resolved only through negotiations and dialogue, and we therefore call on all parties to exert every effort towards the full implementation of resolution 2254 (2015) to further avoid the displacement of Syrians and loss of innocent lives. If there is no progress on the political front, the humanitarian catastrophe will further deteriorate and there will be more loss of life and destruction. An alternative to war must be found.

Annex XIII**Statement by the Permanent Representative of Tunisia to the United Nations, Kais Kabtani**

I thank Under-Secretary-General Mark Lowcock and civil society representative Amany Qaddour for their briefings.

Syria is today on the brink of an economic collapse that is likely to worsen the humanitarian crisis. The fallout from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) outbreak has only exacerbated the economic crisis and compounded the multiple problems facing the country. All economic conditions have reached alarming levels, ranging from food insecurity to hyperinflation and massive unemployment, along with the spread of the coronavirus getting increasingly out of control.

The Syrian plight is further seen in deeply impoverished communities, crumbling State institutions and a deeply fractured society among aggrieved populations, militias and corrupt circles. It is unacceptable and intolerable that ordinary innocent Syrians continue to bear the brunt of the conflict, economic meltdown and impact of COVID-19. We should not let them suffer or die due to the lack of access to food and medicine or the lack of economic prospects.

From the outset, Tunisia's consistent position has been to state that there is no viable alternative to a political settlement in line with resolution 2254 (2015) in order to end the human suffering and put Syria on a resolute and forward-looking trajectory of inclusive peace and sustainable development. Until a political solution is reached, principled life-saving aid must continue to be scaled up throughout Syria to meet the growing needs and grapple with the aggravated risks and vulnerabilities.

Tunisia welcomes the results of the pledging conference for Syria and the region held at the end of last month in Brussels. We underline the importance of ensuring that financial needs be met, as per the United Nations humanitarian response plan and the COVID-19 response plan.

The Security Council charted earlier this month the course for action in conflict situations, including that of Syria, especially as they are faced with the COVID-19 pandemic. In that regard, resolutions 2532 (2020) and 2533 (2020) have set out the framework for Syria through specific provisions on the general and immediate cessation of hostilities and a durable humanitarian truce to enable a United Nations-led, United Nations-coordinated effort for tackling the coronavirus, as well as on cross-border humanitarian relief into north-western Syria, respectively. Those key provisions cannot be overemphasized. However, I would like to underscore the additional following points in the light of the developments on the ground.

First and foremost, there is an urgent need to enhance prevention, mitigation and response measures in order to deal adequately with the mounting spread of the coronavirus disease. We welcome the ongoing efforts of the United Nations country team and the World Health Organization in Syria, in collaboration with the Syrian Government and other relevant actors, pursuant to a needs-based, vulnerability-based approach for all Syria. As the Syrian medical infrastructure has been largely downgraded, underequipped or destroyed, it is essential that the safe, unhindered and sustained delivery of tests, treatments and medicine be ensured across Syria, using cross-line and cross-border modalities.

Secondly, we remain concerned about the persistent low-intensity violence in the north-east, the north-west and the south of Syria. The recurring disruption of water and electricity systems in the north-east is particularly concerning amid growing tensions in this region. We recall that access to clean water and sanitation are key components of tackling COVID-19. We call on all parties to exercise

self-restraint and to protect civilians and civilian infrastructure in line with their obligations under international humanitarian law and international human rights law.

Last but not least, the dire economic situation in Syria warrants that humanitarian and non-humanitarian assistance go hand in hand to cope with the fragility, help achieve recovery and build the resilience of Syrians over the longer term. At this critical juncture, it is essential that the economic engagement and assistance of the international community be ensured, along with strengthened joint projects of the United Nations humanitarian and development agencies, not least in rehabilitating severely damaged hospitals, schools and water, electricity and sanitation supplies.

Annex XIV**Statement by the Permanent Representative of the United States of America to the United Nations, Kelly Craft**

I would like to begin by thanking Under-Secretary-General Lowcock and Amany Qaddour, of Syria Relief and Development, for their briefings today. I would like to open with a quotation by Amany from the Cable News Network:

“We talk about the ability to stay home and be on lockdown, and we see people rushing to stores right now. That is not something you have in Syria; you are not able to prepare for what appears to be an apocalypse and go get a month’s worth of food. You’re displaced, you’re out in the open in a tent that might not even have a door, and you cannot protect yourself from these threats ... [including] the major threats of infectious disease.” We cannot express our gratitude enough for the true emotions felt by Amany today and the fact that she is really defining public service and what it is to be a public servant, the heart of a public servant. I acknowledge that, and I truly felt that the small wins to her bring a huge perspective, as they do to all of us. I thank her so much for her briefing today.”

The Security Council’s adoption of resolution 2533 (2020) provides a lifeline and hope to millions of internally displaced persons in north-western Syria who have relied on the United Nations cross-border humanitarian aid deliveries day in and day out over the past five years. They know now that they will continue to receive life-saving food, shelter and medicine for another year, including through the harsh winter months.

But, make no mistake, the continuation of the cross-border aid deliveries through a single crossing via Bab Al-Hawa is fragile. The United States and the majority of members of the Council have demanded more crossings because we know that they are necessary to address the needs of the Syrian people. Russia and China ruthlessly stand in the way.

Moscow and Beijing’s decision to veto two separate draft resolutions to deny the United Nations use of Bab Al-Salam for cross-border aid deliveries has left millions of Syrians in north-western Syria vulnerable and in need at the height of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. Resolution 2533 (2020) slows cross-border humanitarian aid deliveries and makes it more expensive for the United Nations and the major donors, such as the United States. It also makes the brave humanitarian workers charged with transporting aid inside Syria more vulnerable to hostile fire. These humanitarian heroes are now more dependent than ever on a comprehensive nationwide ceasefire that to this day remains elusive despite the relative calm in Idlib since the establishment of the Turkish-Russian de-escalation zone on 5 March.

As the United States continues to be the largest single humanitarian donor to this operation — now totalling more than \$11.3 billion in humanitarian assistance since the start of the conflict — it is our responsibility to ensure that every dollar given to the United Nations is used effectively to help as many Syrian civilians as possible. That is why the Trump Administration opposed Russia and China’s removal of Bab Al-Salam. Moscow and Beijing made a purely political and amoral choice to help the Al-Assad regime reassert more control over the lives of Syrians whom he has shown no interest in protecting. Humanitarian access to Syrians is now more difficult, costly and dangerous. This is aid that is paid for largely by the United States and our European, Canadian and Arab partners to support Syrian civilians.

Unlike Russia and China, the United States refuses to play politics with the lives of innocent Syrians.

We also have to remember the 1.3 million people who relied on the Al-Yarubiyah border crossing for life-saving assistance from Iraq. There is no doubt that Russia and China's December 2019 vetoes of the Council's reauthorization of Al-Yarubiyah (see S/PV.8697) and the Al-Assad regime's callous unwillingness to increase cross-line access have disrupted the region's response to COVID-19 and caused a significant gap in health assistance.

Resolution 2533 (2020) must be a wake-up call for the international community. There is still no viable alternative to the United Nations cross-border operations; yet now there is only a single crossing point for aid to enter. Cross-line deliveries from Damascus are not working. Cross-line deliveries are insufficient in the face of the growing humanitarian needs of the Syrian people. Most troubling, Al-Assad is still unwilling to make the adjustments required to make cross-line assistance a viable alternative to cross-border. The United States will not accept the Al-Assad regime's policy of denying humanitarian aid to people living outside its military control.

The routine denial of humanitarian aid by Damascus is sadly just one in a long list of the Al-Assad regime's atrocities, along with torture, the forced disappearances of more than 100,000 people, the dropping of barrel bombs, the multiple confirmed cases of chemical-weapon attacks, the displacement of millions of Syrians and other despicable acts. Throughout all of this, Russia and Iran have acted as a shield for the regime rather than a protector of the Syrian people.

Notably, regime forces and their affiliated mercenaries, including those supported by Iran, have yet to withdraw from the de-escalation zone, as required by the Astana agreement. The possibility of a Russian and regime resurgence can happen at any moment, as large numbers of reinforcements have arrived outside Jabal Al-Zawiya, Al-Arba'in, Saraqib and Kabinah. Over the past three weeks, the front line in southern Idlib has witnessed a major reconstitution of regime forces, together with artillery deployments along the full length of the line of control.

The 7 July report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/44/61) notes the devastating impacts of Syrian regime and Russian assaults in Idlib province on Syrian civilians, millions of whom were already displaced from their homes by the regime's earlier reckless and destructive campaigns of violence. The Commission's latest report is further confirmation by the United Nations that the Al-Assad regime and its enablers are responsible for the vast majority of atrocities inflicted on the Syrian people, as well as the dire ongoing humanitarian conditions, made worse by decreasing humanitarian access.

The COVID-19 virus is worsening the existing humanitarian crisis, which is already negatively affected by major displacement, high population density in the north-west and inadequate sanitation in many parts of Syria. We support the decisions of the local councils in Aleppo and Idlib governorates, which have taken precautionary measures such as suspending local markets, banning public gatherings and shifting schools to remote education in recent weeks.

In response to those needs, the Trump Administration has allocated more than \$31 million to support mitigation and response activities throughout Syria, including among displaced populations living in crowded settings in opposition-held areas.

Protecting and aiding the most vulnerable must be our highest priority. One example that we wish to applaud is the work of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). With financial support from the United

States, it has quadrupled its emergency response and support to the people in north-western Syria. Already this year, UNHCR has provided protection services to more than 66,000 people and offered shelter to more than half a million people and relief commodities to more than 1 million needy Syrians in the north-west.

I will conclude my statement with a few comments on the Trump Administration's decisive actions to hold the Al-Assad regime and its supporters accountable for two of the conflict's most horrific humanitarian tragedies against the people of Hamah and Maarat Al-Numan.

The Departments of State and Treasury continued the United States sanctions campaign against the Al-Assad regime by releasing 14 new designations under the Caesar Syria Civilian Protection Act and other authorities. This campaign began last month with the first round of Caesar Act designations.

We have named today's tranche of designations the Hama and Maarat Al-Numan sanctions. These names are meant to memorialize the victims of two of the Al-Assad regime's most notorious atrocities, both of which occurred during this week in 2011 and 2019. Nine years ago, Bashar Al-Assad's troops carried out a brutal siege of the city of Hamah, killing scores of peaceful protesters in a shocking sign of what was to come. One year ago, the Al-Assad regime and its allies bombed a busy marketplace in Maarat Al-Numan, killing 42 innocent Syrians.

It is time for Al-Assad's needless, brutal war to end. This, above all, is what our sanctions campaign is meant to bring about. A political solution under resolution 2254 (2015) is the only credible path to the peace the Syrian people deserve.

We have heard Russia and China spin a false narrative that United States sanctions are to blame for the crisis in Syria. That is just outlandish propaganda, but also a sinister attempt to whitewash Assad's brutality and crimes against humanity. The Caesar Act and other United States Syria sanctions are not intended to harm the Syrian people and do not target humanitarian assistance or hinder our stabilization activities in north-eastern Syria.

We will continue our humanitarian assistance through our international and Syrian partners, even in areas under the Al-Assad regime's control. The United States will continue to act bilaterally and as a member of the Security Council to provide humanitarian support to the Syrian people. We must protect millions from the Al-Assad regime's inhumane campaign against its own citizens.

I am going to close with another one of Amany's quotes: "Small wins bring perspective". I know that, as a Council, we can all bring many small wins in order to help her achieve her goals in Syria.

Annex XV**Statement by the Permanent Representative of Viet Nam to the United Nations, Dang Dinh Quy**

I would like to thank Under Secretary-General Mark Lowcock for his informative briefing. I would also like to thank Ms. Amany Qaddour for sharing her views.

As pointed out by the Under Secretary-General in his remarks, the overall humanitarian situation in Syria remains extremely desperate. Viet Nam is gravely concerned over the dire condition of millions of people in Syria, which is aggravated by the severe impacts of the current economic crisis and the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic.

It is very distressing to hear reports of 9.3 million people — over half of the population — having to struggle against food insecurity day after day. In addition, the pandemic has become more and more severe in recent weeks, as the north-west reported its first cases earlier this month and the north-east continues to see a rising number of cases. The pandemic not only targets the most vulnerable population, it also attacks health workers, who account for 7 per cent of reported cases, thereby further weakening the already limited health-care capacity.

We are also troubled by the reported situation in other areas, including various internally displaced person camps, with the most vulnerable populations. Due to the disruption of the Allouk water station, water insecurity has become a serious challenge for people living in surrounding areas, including the Al-Hol and other camps, especially in the time of COVID-19.

To gradually improve the situation, our delegation believes that, first of all, it is of the utmost importance to enhance humanitarian access to areas in Syria. Our delegation would like to reiterate our call for restraint by all relevant parties. Stability is an essential requirement with a view to creating the most favourable conditions for the safe and unimpeded delivery of humanitarian aid throughout the country. Accordingly, we support the call by the Secretary-General for a nationwide ceasefire, and urge all parties to heed that call.

We take note of efforts to maintain the March ceasefire agreement in Idlib. However, sporadic insecurity incidents are showing how unstable the situation still is. Any further deterioration of the security situation, especially in this area, would severely impede humanitarian efforts and lead to the suffering of millions of civilians.

Secondly, regarding the humanitarian response, our delegation commends the efforts of the international community in providing support for the Syrian people. We welcome the renewal of the cross-border humanitarian assistance mechanism in Syria. The 12-month authorization of Bab Al-Hawa border crossing is encouraging as it will allow the United Nations and its implementing partners to better prepare for their work.

However, much still needs to be done to make up for the increasing humanitarian relief needs in the north-west as well as the north-east. Special attention should be paid to improving food security and the health-care system in Syria. We look forward to receiving reports on measures and adjustments to implement resolution 2533 (2020) as well as the impact thereof.

The need to facilitate COVID-19 preparedness and response across Syria has become more urgent than ever, especially in terms of testing capacities and protective measures to prevent the spread of the virus. We find it extremely relevant

to make sure that the COVID-19-response capability is not impacted by any type of sanctions.

We call on the Syrian Government to continue to step up its cooperation with all relevant parties, including the United Nations, to improve and facilitate humanitarian access and response in Syria. In particular, cross-line delivery has to be further strengthened.

Finally, the only way out of these many socioeconomic and security challenges remains a comprehensive and sustained political solution led and owned by the Syrian people, in line with resolution 2254 (2015) and in full accordance with international law.

In conclusion, we are delighted to see that the parties are getting ready for reconvening the work of the Constitutional Committee next month. The successful conduct of the upcoming session is much desired and would be an encouraging sign towards ending the suffering of the Syrian people.

Annex XVI

Statement by the Permanent of Mission of Turkey to the United Nations

Let me start by expressing our thanks to Under-Secretary-General Lowcock for his briefing. We also thank Ms. Amany Qaddour for her insightful remarks on the bleak reality on the ground.

What we have been witnessing in Syria since 2011 is nothing less than an all-out war by the regime against its own people. The deliberate targeting of medical facilities, doctors, schools and children, the use of chemical weapons and the bombing of humanitarian aid convoys killed hundreds of thousands of Syrians and displaced millions. Critical infrastructure has been destroyed, resulting in the lack of shelter, in addition to broken health and education systems. Today, the humanitarian situation remains as dire as ever.

The situation in the north-west remains one of the most acute and severe humanitarian crises in the world. Due to regime's military campaign, Idlib's entire population is squeezed into a small area along our borders, in makeshift tents.

We have repeated on many occasions before the Security Council that a potential outbreak of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) would gravely affect the already dire humanitarian situation in the north-west. We have also drawn attention to the severely weakened health system and the imperative to renew the cross-border humanitarian mechanism.

Since the first COVID-19 case was recorded on 9 July, 23 people have tested positive in the region — and this is while testing capacity remains very low. In scaling up the volume of the cross-border operations over the recent months, with the facilitation of Turkey, the United Nations and its partners took precautions against the potential spread of the virus. Yet, the situation remains precarious.

Millions of people living in the region rely entirely on the humanitarian assistance channelled through cross-border operations from Turkey. It is regrettable that, at this critical time when more humanitarian access is needed, lifeline cross-border operations have been reduced, leaving vulnerable people on the line amid the regime's aggression and the ongoing global pandemic.^[P.2]_[SEP] We take note of the extension of the cross-border mechanism by the Council with only Bab Al-Hawa crossing for a period of 12 months and regret that Bab Al-Salam crossing was excluded from its scope. The exclusion of that crossing point will make humanitarian access to 1.3 million Syrians in northern Aleppo, who continue to depend on United Nations assistance for their survival, extremely difficult. In June, 25 per cent of all United Nations cross-border aid into the north-west came through Bab Al-Salam. The remaining Bab Al-Hawa crossing will not be a feasible alternative to reach those people in need due to insecurity, distance and related costs and access constraints. In any case, cross-line access will not be a viable option. The United Nations has reported on several occasions that cross-line is not functional in the north-west. In the absence of an alternative, the exclusion of Bab Al-Salam from the mechanism will have major consequences for the region and increase the humanitarian responsibility that Turkey has been shouldering for more than nine years.

The Security Council's failure to renew the mechanism with the inclusion of other available crossings from Turkey, particularly Bab Al-Salam, will only increase the suffering of those in need, in particular, the most vulnerable, such as women and children. There are already widespread shortages of personal protective equipment, ventilators, medicines and oxygen throughout hospitals in the north-west. The

ongoing shortage of doctors and other humanitarian workers is also adding to the strain on humanitarian operations.

Shutting down the most direct route to food, shelter and medical assistance will not serve the political calculations of those behind it. Turkey will continue to assist United Nations cross-border humanitarian operations at record levels. We will not abandon the Syrian people in northern Aleppo. We will swiftly adapt to the new situation and never turn back on any humanitarian need in the region. In doing so, we will act in coordination and cooperation with all stakeholders, in particular, the United Nations and its agencies, in order to address additional challenges this new situation might create. We are also ready to work with the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and our donor partners to explore new ways to reach these people. It is our joint responsibility to bring the most needed assistance to those in need while the Security Council should urgently consider reauthorizing the use of Bab Al-Salam crossing in light of the increased needs.

There can be no sustainable humanitarian solution to the crisis without a political solution based on resolution 2254 (2015). In the absence of any progress on the political track, millions of Syrians continue to be trapped in a vicious cycle of conflict.

Turkey has been doing its part on this front as well. The ceasefire in Idlib is holding despite violations by the regime. More than 300,000 displaced Syrians have returned to their homes thanks to relative calm on the ground.

Our aim in Idlib is to make the ceasefire sustainable. This is essential for protecting civilians; improving the humanitarian situation on the ground; mitigating risk of refugee flows towards Turkey and beyond; and advancing the political process. This is also of utmost importance for Turkey's national security.

In accordance with the Additional Protocol of 5 March, we have so far conducted 22 joint ground patrols with Russia along the M4 highway, and the entire 72-kilometre patrol route was covered in July. On 14 July, during the recent joint patrol mission, a vehicle-borne improvised explosive device attack targeted Turkish and Russian vehicles alike. Turkey remains committed to the full implementation of the Additional Protocol in order to ensure lasting calm in Idlib.

On the other hand, we will continue to combat all terrorist groups, including the Kurdish Workers Party/Kurdish People's Protection Units (PKK/YPG), which seeks to undermine the territorial integrity of Syria and represents a direct threat to Turkey's national security. PKK/YPG continues its infiltration attempts and attacks against civilians throughout northern Syria. Most recently, on 26 July, they targeted a marketplace in Ras Al-Ayn with an improvised explosive device attack, which left five innocent civilians dead and 12 wounded.

That terrorist organization also burns crop fields, the sole source of livelihood of a large portion of local population in opposition-controlled areas. We continue to respond in self-defence against PKK/YPG attacks.

The ongoing atrocities and humanitarian disaster in Syria can be overcome only by addressing the root cause of the problem: the violent oppression of the democratic aspirations of the Syrians. As revealed by several United Nations reports, the acts of the regime and its backers amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity. The erosion of international law and international humanitarian law, and the continuing violations of human rights across Syria are a serious threat to international peace and security.

Syrians should not be left alone by the international community. They deserve our collective action. In taking such action, we should also continue to expose and shame those who are on the wrong side of history and humanity.

What we heard from the previous speaker was another futile attempt by the regime seeking to divert attention from the enormous destruction and human suffering it has imposed on its own people. We reiterate our strong will to continue supporting the legitimate aspirations of Syrians and assisting them in meeting their humanitarian needs.
