

**Security Council**

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**Letter dated 1 March 2021 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. Sonia Khush, Syria Response Director, Save the Children, as well as the statements delivered by the representatives of China, Estonia, France, India, Ireland (on behalf of Ireland and Norway), Kenya, Mexico, the Niger, the Russian Federation, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Tunisia, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, the United States of America and Viet Nam in connection with the video-teleconference on “The situation in the Middle East (Syria)” convened on Thursday, 25 February 2021. Statements were also delivered by the representatives of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Syrian Arab Republic and Turkey.

In accordance with the procedure set out in the letter dated 7 May 2020 by the President of the Security Council addressed to the Permanent Representatives of the members of Council (S/2020/372), which was agreed in the light of the extraordinary circumstances caused by the coronavirus disease pandemic, these briefings and statements will be issued as a document of the Security Council.

(Signed) Linda **Thomas-Greenfield**  
President of the Security Council



## Annex I

## **Briefing by the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, Mark Lowcock**

I will focus on three points today. First, the economic crisis and the rise in food insecurity; secondly, humanitarian access; and thirdly, the protection of civilians.

In addition, I have been asked by the Secretary-General to provide, on behalf of the United Nations system, a briefing on the United Nations strategic framework and the “Parameters and Principles” document. This was a request made by the Russian Federation as conveyed to the Secretary-General’s Office by this month’s President of the Security Council.

Let us start with the economy and disturbing new food security data published by the World Food Programme last week. Around 60 per cent of the Syrian population, 12.4 million people, do not have regular access to enough safe and nutritious food. An additional 4.5 million people have fallen into this category over the past year.

The increase is shocking, but not surprising. Syria’s fragile economy suffered multiple shocks over the past 18 months. The steep depreciation of the Syrian pound, which lost more than three quarters of its value over the past year, has been one of the visible effects of this. While the value of the pound dropped, prices of food and other essential items increased by over 200 per cent. Purchasing power has dwindled quickly as a result. Average household expenses now exceed average income by an estimated 20 per cent.

The result is that millions of Syrians are resorting to desperate measures to survive. Over 70 per cent of Syrians say they have taken on new debt over the past year. Many are selling assets and livestock. Parents are eating less so they can feed their children and sending them to work instead of to school. Those who have run out of options are simply going hungry.

More than half a million children under 5 in Syria suffer from stunting as a result of chronic malnutrition, according to our latest assessments. We fear this number will increase. These problems are visible in many parts of the country, but the situation is particularly bad in the north-west and north-east, where nutrition surveillance data show that up to one in three children in some areas suffers from stunting. The effects this will have on their development and learning will be lifelong and irreversible.

Last week I spoke with a group of Syrian doctors. A doctor at a paediatrics hospital told me that of his 80 in-patient beds, half are occupied by malnourished children. Five children died at his hospital as a result of malnutrition in the past two months. Another paediatrician told me that she diagnoses malnutrition in up to 20 children a day. But parents are bringing their children to her for completely different reasons, unaware that they are suffering from malnutrition. Malnutrition, she said, has become so normal that parents cannot spot the signs in their own children.

Some doctors also told me how concerned they are about a potential disruption of cross-border aid into the north-west of Syria. That brings me to my next point, namely, humanitarian access. All humanitarian assistance that enters north-west Syria is delivered cross-border. It supports 2.4 million people on average each month, and the majority of this is delivered by the United Nations operation. Without the cross-border operation, doctors in north-west Syria, like some of those I spoke to, would not be able to provide those children the care they need to survive. They would not have the resources and supplies to carry on. Within a short period of time, they said, the situation would go from terrible to catastrophic.

As the Secretary-General notes in his latest report (S/2021/160) when it comes to delivering life-saving aid to people in need, all channels should be made, and kept, available. Conditions in the north-west are worse now than they were when the Security Council decided to extend its authorization for cross-border assistance last July. A failure to extend the authorization would trigger suffering and loss of life on a massive scale.

The United Nations is continuing its efforts to conduct a first cross-line mission into north-west Syria. The aim is not to have a one-off mission, but to have regular cross-line missions that complement the ongoing cross-border operation.

A new operational plan is being developed to accommodate the concerns of the relevant parties. The new proposal, which is in the process of being submitted, foresees a United Nations aid convoy crossing front lines and distributing aid in Al-Atareb with appropriate involvement from local volunteers and other relevant partners, the precise details of which and composition of whom need to be agreed. We continue to discuss this but have yet to reach an agreement with all the parties concerned. Without that, we will not be able to conduct the cross-line mission.

Let me be absolutely clear: the United Nations is ready. We have been ready for a long time. What is needed now is wider agreement so that the first mission can go ahead.

Turning to the north-east, an increase in tensions in recent months caused temporary disruptions in emergency assistance for hundreds of thousands of people.

The United Nations, however, has continued to make every effort to scale up cross-line deliveries of medical supplies into the north-east. This includes deliveries of 344 tons of health supplies, amounting to almost 3 million treatments, in 2020. The World Health Organization plans to deliver another 50 tons of health supplies during the first quarter of 2021.

Expanding the reach of medical supplies delivered cross-line will continue to depend on expedited approvals, improved security conditions leading to an end to road blockages and access to adequate funding.

These deliveries are critical, but given the immense health needs in this region, they are not enough. Only 6 per cent of public hospitals and none of the public health centres in the north-east are assessed to be fully functioning. As the Secretary-General observes in his report,

“a year on from the expiration of the Security Council’s authorization for the United Nations entities and their implementing partners to use the Ya’rubiyah border crossing, humanitarian needs in the north-east remain high, and have been exacerbated by the [coronavirus disease] pandemic.” (S/2021/160, para. 57)

My next point concerns the protection of civilians.

I am deeply saddened to report the death of another humanitarian worker in north-western Syria on 16 February. The colleague was working on a United Nations-supported health project in Al-Bab, providing services for people affected by the coronavirus disease. He was killed by a car bomb in a market in the middle of Al-Bab city on 16 February. Two others — a driver and a co-worker — were injured in the attack.

This was the latest in a series of horrific bombings that have killed dozens of civilians and injured many more in northern Syria in recent months.

The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights has the mandate in the United Nations to document incidents of this sort, involving civilian casualties.

It has recorded an increase in civilian casualties in northern Syria due to increased use of attacks using improvised explosive devices. As the Secretary-General has repeatedly said in his reports on Syria, perpetrators of serious violations and abuses of human rights and serious violations of international humanitarian law must be held accountable.

On 17 February, a day after I spoke with the group of doctors, a hospital in Afrin was damaged when a missile struck a building right in front of it. A hospital staffer, his wife and three children who were nearby were injured in the attack.

Humanitarian workers in Syria are delivering aid every day under the most difficult circumstances and at great personal risk. They must be protected.

Finally, let me update you on the United Nations Strategic Framework for the Syrian Arab Republic and the Parameters and Principles of United Nations Assistance in Syria, which the Secretary-General has asked me to speak to, on behalf of the United Nations system and as requested by the Russian Federation.

The drafting of the United Nations Strategic Framework covering the period 2021-2023 was initiated last year and is aimed at reflecting the agreed operational activities of the United Nations country team in response to needs and priorities in Syria, from which the programmes and projects of specific United Nations agencies, funds and programmes will be derived. The United Nations is moving the process forward and currently working on the third draft of the document, in consultation with all stakeholders in Syria and elsewhere.

The programmatic priorities reflected in the current draft result from an extensive dialogue with national partners and are informed by ongoing programmes and available resources. Consultations also continue with all other partners, in line with established practice, to help enrich the outcome and secure wide support, including financial support, for the successful implementation of the Strategic Framework.

To allow for further consultation on all the pending issues, the United Nations has sought a six-month extension to the current Strategic Framework. Our Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator and country team are moving ahead in an open and transparent process, working with our national counterparts to deliver the best possible outcome.

As the drafting process proceeds, the Parameters and Principles of United Nations Assistance in Syria document serves as a key internal guidance tool to help target the operations of the United Nations country team in what remains a very complex context.

The Parameters and Principles were formulated through a consultative process, drawing on existing mandates, and shared within the United Nations system to ensure that support and assistance are provided to those in need in all areas of Syria in an equitable and non-discriminatory manner, with a needs-based approach upholding neutrality and impartiality. The document is consistent with the principles of the Charter of the United Nations and relevant Security Council resolutions. It reconfirms core humanitarian principles, ensuring that the principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence lie at the core of our work.

Ultimately, all United Nations operations in Syria are conducted in full compliance with resolutions adopted by the Security Council and with other relevant decisions, including General Assembly resolutions 46/182 and 75/233, on the quadrennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system.

I also note that activities undertaken by the United Nations country team under the Strategic Framework are complementary to the humanitarian response plan in order to save lives, enhance protection and increase resilience and access to services, including through the rehabilitation of critical civilian infrastructure, which serve a crucial humanitarian function. This is essential at a time when the economy continues to suffer severe decline, poverty and hunger are on the rise, and humanitarian needs are increasing.

## Annex II

### **Briefing by the Syria Response Director, Save the Children, Sonia Khush**

I would like to thank you for this opportunity to address the Council on the humanitarian situation in Syria and for allowing us to bring the voices of children and their families to this key institution.

While this year marks 10 years of conflict in Syria, the situation facing children today is as urgent as it has ever been. During the last decade, more than half the population has been forced to flee their homes and thousands of children have been killed. Around half of Syria's children are now growing up having known nothing but conflict, which has permeated all aspects of their lives and robbed them of their childhoods.

The outbreak of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) has added another layer of suffering to an already dire situation. Children today are facing a graver reality than at any other point in the 10-year conflict. They are more likely to be in need of humanitarian assistance and more likely to go hungry, die from preventable diseases, miss out on school and face protection risks.

I would like to start today by addressing the issue that children consistently raise with us — which is, their wish to go to school.

We are facing an unprecedented education crisis in Syria. The combination of conflict, displacement, poverty and now COVID-19 has created conditions in which millions of children are missing out on education. Research carried out by Save the Children last December found that in northern Syria, for example, two out of three children are now missing out on school.

Schools should be safe places where children can learn, play and dream about what they want to be when they grow up. Instead, after 10 years we continue to witness attacks on schools, the use of schools by armed groups and the prevalence of unexploded ordnance in schools.

We met 11-year-old Basma in Al-Hol camp. She remembers the time when she was in second grade and a shell fell next to her school. She told us: "We were all girls and we hid under the school desks in the classroom. There were loud explosions and glass from the windows shattered everywhere." Yet Basma still has dreams of becoming a doctor to treat her sick mother.

The immediate effects of attacks on a school can include death, injury and the destruction of the building. However, in the longer term, attacks can lead to diminished education quality, loss of teachers, weakened educational systems and the risk of children never returning to school. Education is also being impacted by the economic crisis, exacerbated by the COVID-19 crisis. As 10-year-old Ziad told us:

"The war forced us to flee and made me drop out of school. I started working in cleaning tiles. I work from morning till night and make less than three dollars a week. I am very tired from working."

Our same research last December showed that 79 per cent of teachers in north-eastern Syria reported that their students had dropped out of school because they had to support their families financially. As many as one in two teachers in north-western Syria is also working without pay, and hundreds of others are going on strike for their salaries as we speak.

Loss of physical learning spaces due to COVID-19 restrictions has also meant that the only option for children to learn is remotely. But most children do not have

access to the Internet and eventually start dropping out of school. We know from experience that many children who have dropped out of school will never return.

Layla is a 38-year-old mother of five, including of a boy named Husam. Layla told the team:

“My son Husam had never been to school until we got to this camp. I really wanted him to learn how to read and write, as no one in our family can do that. He was so excited. Unfortunately, the school closed because of COVID-19, and now he is scared because he does not know if he will ever have the chance to learn again.”

We are very concerned at the impact that the lack of education of Syria's children will have on them now and on the country's future, as another generation of children now begins its journey under the shadows of the conflict in Syria.

The second issue I would like to raise is the serious protection crisis facing children in the country. Across northern Syria, five million people continue to rely on humanitarian assistance, delivered mostly cross-border, to meet their basic needs. This includes at least 2 million children. At least half of these children are displaced. Some have been displaced more than 10 times in their short lives, with no view of achieving a durable solution soon.

Basic needs for adequate food, shelter, water and hygiene are still not being met, and each year families face either intense heat or brutal cold and flooding in flimsy shelters. Just last month, flash floods in north-west Syria led to the death of a six-year-old boy and affected over 140,000 displaced people, the majority of whom were women and children. People are in desperate need of heating, fuel, cash, food, mattresses and blankets.

The nutrition situation in the country is becoming alarming. One in eight children in Syria is now stunted. This means they have gone for months without eating nutritious food that is vital to their survival and development, and the number of children who go to bed hungry every day is in the millions.

Child labour is becoming increasingly prevalent, and children may also be engaged in harmful work and exploitation. Meanwhile, teenage boys are particularly vulnerable to recruitment by armed groups.

In many instances, girls are being forced to end their education and engage in early marriage. This will have profound and long-term consequences on them, including the loss of education and personal and economic independence. Last year we met 15-year-old Dalia who had just gotten engaged. She told our local partner staff, “Every time my fiancé calls, I feel a sense of anxiety. I dream about continuing my education and finding a job in the future, not marriage.” Our team worked with Dalia and her parents. Luckily Dalia is not engaged anymore and is back in school, but there are thousands more of girls like her that are not so lucky.

In this context, COVID-19 and the socioeconomic impacts of the pandemic are making an already dire situation worse and increasing children's vulnerability to protection risks. The way we can address the profound challenges facing children today has not changed. Continued delivery of life-saving supplies — through all possible means, including the cross-border mechanism — is essential for their survival. This must also come with a focus on addressing the root causes of children's suffering, prioritizing investment in education and child-protection programming, including mental-health and psychosocial interventions.

Finally, I would like to draw the Council's attention to the specific protection risks being faced by children and their mothers in camps in north-eastern Syria,



including in Al-Hol and Roj camps, home to 64,000 people, more than 90 per cent of whom are women and children. This population includes more than 10,000 foreign children and their mothers, who come from every region of the world. The majority of children in these camps are under the age of 12, and half of them are less than five years old.

The conditions in the two camps are dire, and critical gaps continue to exist across all services. Lately, there has been an alarming increase of violent security incidents in Al-Hol, putting children further at risk, and regularly disrupting our humanitarian programmes. A 13-year-old girl named Salma in Al-Hol camp told us,

“We had to go through a lot to extend electricity to our tent. It was amazing to finally have light inside the tent. But after the killings started, there were rumours that people who have electricity in their tents were being targeted. So now, we do not turn our lights on at night because of the fear of being killed.”

There are confirmed cases of COVID-19 in Al-Hol. Yet we remain very concerned about the health-care response capacity in both the camp and the region, particularly in the context of restrictions in humanitarian access to north-eastern Syria.

Over the last few months, my team in the Al-Hol annex watched as a nine-year-old girl from Azerbaijan got progressively sicker due to a kidney disease. We raised her plight repeatedly to the authorities in order for her to be able to access kidney dialysis outside the camp. We also urgently tried to arrange her repatriation to her country of origin as a humanitarian case. To my great frustration, we were not successful with either effort, and tragically she died last month.

We witnessed an innocent child die in a foreign country, a needless death from a disease that is treatable. At the end of the day, foreign children trapped in Syria are innocent victims of the conflict and must be treated as such, not as deadly security threats to be kept behind barbed wire. Like all children inside Syria, they have lived through conflict, bombardment and acute deprivation. Some know nothing but conflict. Indeed, when one of my colleagues asked a foreign girl in the Al-Hol annex, “What country are you from?”, she replied, “I’m from that tent.”

They are also unfortunately losing faith in our ability to help. A mother from Turkey told us that her children asked her many times to register them as orphans, because orphans are more likely to be repatriated from the camp. These children need specialized help to recover from the brutal experience of being the first victims of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant, physically and mentally, and they need help to return to normality. The kind of support they need is impossible to provide in a place like Al-Hol.

We therefore urge all Member States to repatriate these extremely vulnerable children to their country of origin, together with their families. Like any other child, they deserve a chance to become doctors, artists or engineers.

In conclusion, to bring the suffering of children in Syria to an end, first and foremost the fighting must stop. There can be no lasting solution to this crisis without peace. Furthermore, in order to address the immense needs that children and their families are facing, humanitarians must be supported to scale up aid safely and effectively through all modalities.

Ten years into the conflict, the challenges I have set out today are more complex than they have ever been, but the standards by which we must respond are simple. Children and their families, wherever they are in Syria, deserve to live with the security of knowing that they will continue to have safe access to the life-saving



support on which they depend, and that the international community will not turn their backs on them at this critical time.

Security Council members continue to have a vital role to play in this effort. Seven years after coming together to pass resolution 2165 (2014) and creating a system whereby humanitarian aid can reach all Syrians wherever they are, the number of people in need of humanitarian assistance has only grown. Amid the worst pandemic the world has seen in a hundred years, I would not know how to tell families in Syria that the Security Council has again limited our access. We welcome — and urge — continued discussion on improving principled humanitarian access and on how to better reach all populations in need. For now, however, there is no other way to sustainably program help for millions of people without the cross-border resolution.

I will end with what seven-year-old Lara told us:

“When I grow up, I want to become a teacher and teach children, so they will not stay out of school. I wish the war would end and all the children could learn how to read and write and go back to their homes.”

I hope I will be able to go back to Lara and the other children I tried to give a voice to today and let them know that Security Council will do everything within its power to ensure they are protected and educated.

**Annex III****Statement by the Deputy Permanent Representative of China to the United Nations, Geng Shuang**

[Original: English and Chinese]

I thank Under-Secretary-General Mark Lowcock and Ms. Sonia Khush for their briefings. I would like to take this opportunity to welcome the new Permanent Representative of the Syrian Arab Republic to the United Nations, Mr. Bassam Sabbagh.

The past two months have witnessed the continued depreciation of the Syrian pound, food prices soaring to the highest level since 2013 and crippling shortages in the reserves of oil and other essential commodities. The coronavirus disease pandemic and natural disasters have conspired to exacerbate the humanitarian plight in Syria. The country's dire economic and humanitarian situation leaves us deeply worried. China calls on the international community to provide more humanitarian, development and reconstruction assistance to support the Syrian Government in responding to the pandemic, revitalizing the economy and providing livelihood assurances. A holistic approach is in order, so the conditions the Syrian people find themselves in can be improved, and that includes emergency assistance to deliver food and medicines, such basic services as water and electricity, and sufficient supplies to stabilize the market.

I wish to underscore once again that unilateral sanctions and an unlawful blockade have been seriously undermining Syria's ability to mobilize resources, develop its economy and launch its reconstruction. It is nothing short of a noose around the collective neck of the Syrian people. It must be undone and undone without delay.

China calls on the United Nations and the international community at large to ramp up humanitarian assistance to Syria with stronger cooperation with its Government. While continuing the cross-border humanitarian operations and making the best use of Bab Al-Hawa crossing point, efforts should be made to make more cross-line deliveries and steadily scale up this modus operandi. We are pleased to know that last year the World Health Organization delivered large quantities of medical supplies to the north-east of the country, with six road convoys and 13 air convoys from within the Syrian territory and that, on a monthly basis, the World Food Programme has provided millions of civilians with food aid through cross-line deliveries.

Through bilateral and multilateral channels, China has provided Syria with \$130 million in aid. Early this month, China announced an aid package of 150,000 doses of vaccine, 20 ventilators and the first shipment of 750 tons of rice. These aid supplies will be arriving in good time. Where we can ensure it, our assistance and support to the Syrian people shall continue.

It warrants underlining that eradicating terrorism once and for all is the only hope that Syria has of returning to normality. This is the sine qua non of improving the economic and humanitarian situation in the country. It behoves the international community to support serious counter-terrorism operations that are in line with international law and the relevant resolutions of the Security Council, with a view to maintaining the country's security and stability.

China takes the accounts given by the briefers earlier very seriously. We are concerned at the incidents that led to civilian casualties, especially casualties among children, who are the future of Syria, and whose lives, nutrition and education must

be safeguarded with utmost effort, so that they can survive, thrive and grow up to become a vital force in building their country.

It is imperative that the international community work together to help extricate Syria from the mire of war and safeguard the basic livelihoods of the Syrian people, especially women and children. The humanitarian issue must not be politicized by attaching political strings to humanitarian aid or by instrumentalizing such aid to exert pressure.

**Annex IV****Statement by the Permanent Representative of Estonia to the United Nations, Sven Jürgenson**

I thank Under-Secretary Lowcock for his briefing on the humanitarian situation in Syria.

As the Syrian conflict approaches its tenth anniversary, let us consider the following. About half a million people have lost their lives, and millions of others have been deprived of their homes and livelihoods. Civilians in Syria still suffer from widespread insecurity and violations of international law. Continued violations and a deteriorating humanitarian situation in the country are also the result of a political impasse in the Security Council. Unfortunately, permanent members have used their veto to block Council actions aimed at ending this tragedy.

One of these vetoes was cast last year (see S/2020/661), which cut in half the cross-border mechanism, which provides life-saving aid to millions of people in northern Syria. The promises of replacing cross-border deliveries with cross-line aid have fallen short. The cross-line aid clearly remains irregular and unreliable, while the ongoing access restrictions continue to hamper the response to the growing needs. It is especially worrying, considering the significant increase of food insecurity. Humanitarian access in Syria is one of the priority issues for the Donor Support Group of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, of which Estonia is a member.

Against the backdrop of the decision to cut back humanitarian aid, the spread of coronavirus disease continues to endanger Syrian civilians, especially the most vulnerable communities, including women and children. We welcome the plan to commence vaccinating the Syrian population through the COVID-19 Vaccines Global Access programme, and we appreciate the efforts of humanitarian workers at this front line.

Instability continues across Syria. We condemn the recent series of terrorist attacks that took place in the areas of Azaz, Al-Bab and Afrin. Stability and granting unimpeded humanitarian access are fundamental preconditions for humanitarian action to be effective.

Military solutions cannot bring peace to Syria. That is why the European Union and its member States are determined to continue their support to the Syrian people. Mitigating the consequences of the Syrian conflict has been one of the priorities of Estonian humanitarian assistance. We look forward to the fifth Brussels Conference on Supporting the Future of Syria and the Region, to be held at the end of March. Estonia has contributed financially for years to support alleviating the human suffering of the Syrian people and will continue to do so until they no longer need our support.

At the same time, we reiterate the European Union position that there will be no funding of reconstruction unless a genuine and inclusive political transition, in line with resolution 2254 (2015), is firmly under way.

**Annex V****Statement by the Permanent Representative of France to the United Nations, Nicolas De Rivi re**

[Original: English and French]

I would like to thank Mr. Lowcock and Ms. Khush for their briefings.

The Syrian population continues to pay the heaviest price of this conflict, which has now gone on for 10 years. More than half of the population experiences food insecurity. The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic continues to spread and we all know that the figures are well below reality.

Everything must be done in order to put in place an immediate cessation of hostilities, under United Nations supervision at the national level, as well as a humanitarian pause, in accordance with resolutions 2532 (2020) and 2254 (2015) and the Secretary-General's call. Ongoing air strikes in the Idlib region are an alarming sign, as is the instability in the south-west and north-east.

The protection of civilians must be an absolute priority. Fourteen humanitarian personnel have lost their lives in the north-west since the beginning of 2020 and more than 900 medical personnel have lost their lives since the beginning of the conflict. We strongly condemn such attacks, and these crimes will not go unpunished. France will continue to fully support the mechanisms to fight impunity. Yesterday's sentencing by a German court of a former Syrian security agent for complicity with crimes against humanity is an important first step in putting an end to impunity for the regime's crimes.

The 20 per cent increase in humanitarian and medical needs in 2021 makes it more essential than ever to ensure full humanitarian access. All parties, especially the Syrian regime, must respect their obligations under international humanitarian law. We call on Russia to put pressure on the regime in this regard.

It is also essential to ensure equitable access to vaccines against COVID-19. All guarantees must be taken to ensure independent monitoring of their distribution. The COVID-19 Vaccine Global Access Facility has a key role to play here.

The systematic blocking of humanitarian assistance by the regime shows more than ever the need to preserve the cross-border aid mechanism. The approval rates of United Nations missions by the regime remain largely insufficient: how can we explain the refusal of 30 per cent of such missions? We must also draw lessons from the loss of Al-Yarubiyah crossing point; no operation to date has compensated for the disappearance of cross-border convoys. As long as the regime continues to hijack aid to punish the population, it is clear that "cross-line" aid from Damascus will remain dysfunctional and cannot be the only viable option.

The donor conference organized by the European Union and the United Nations for 29 and 30 March will be an important step. The European Union and its member States will continue to ensure full respect for the guarantees of impartiality and transparency in the delivery of aid, and the implementation of the Parameters and Principles of United Nations Assistance in Syria document.

Attempts to accuse Europe and its partners of conditioning aid must not mislead anyone. I would like to recall that the European Union and its member States are the main funders of the humanitarian response in Syria, including in the areas held by the regime. Since 2011, nearly €20 billion have been mobilized by Europeans in response to this crisis. The humanitarian response plan was financed last year at about 85 per cent by the European Union, its member States, the United Kingdom and the United States.

Finally, until a credible political process in line with resolution 2254 (2015) has been engaged, France, like the European Union, will not finance reconstruction or any assistance aligned with the regime's development priorities. States calling for the reconstruction of Syria should start by strengthening their contributions to the humanitarian response.

Our positions on the lifting of sanctions and normalization also remain unchanged.

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**Annex VI****Statement by the Permanent Representative of India to the United Nations, T. S. Tirumurti**

Let me begin by thanking Under-Secretary-General Mark Lowcock for his briefing on the humanitarian situation in Syria and the United Nations Strategic Framework for the Syrian Arab Republic.

The 10-year long Syrian conflict has brought much suffering to the Syrian people. Syria is facing a dire situation compounded by a multiplicity of factors, including the coronavirus disease (COVID-19), harsh winter conditions and food insecurity, putting into peril the future of its 17.6 million citizens, including nearly 6.2 million displaced people, the largest internally displaced population anywhere in the world. Across the region, 10 million people, including 5.5 million Syrian refugees, continue to depend on humanitarian assistance. Children have been particularly badly affected.

Since we last met in this Council, the dire humanitarian situation has been further worsened by deteriorating economic conditions as well as continuing food insecurity. According to a January 2021 World Food Programme (WFP) report, the price of Syria's standard basic food items basket in December 2020 was 236 per cent higher compared to December 2019, a month-to-month increase of 13 per cent, which brought the price to its record high since WFP started monitoring in 2013. In addition, the recent increase in the price of bread has added to the vulnerability of the population. The supply of fuel has also been affected by delays in the arrival of supplies. Furthermore, the floods in late January destroyed more than 21,000 tents in internally displaced person camps in Syria, affecting more than 120,000 people.

The scale, severity and complexity of humanitarian needs should provoke the collective conscience of this Council, particularly of those who advocate linking humanitarian assistance to their expected outcomes on the political track. It is difficult to comprehend such an approach. Politicization of the humanitarian track must end. It is not feasible for people in need of urgent and dire humanitarian assistance to wait endlessly until political objectives of all parties to the conflict are fully met.

Allow me now to address two interlinked questions of humanitarian access and principles, which are closely interrelated in the context of Syria.

India firmly believes that all humanitarian aid delivery to Syria must be consistent with United Nations guiding principles for humanitarian assistance. Humanitarian assistance to Syria, be it cross-border or cross-line, must take into consideration the independence, territorial integrity and sovereignty of Syria. At the same time, concrete steps need to be taken to address hurdles obstructing the functioning of both cross-border and cross-line operations, in particular, the delays in granting requisite approvals to humanitarian aid convoys. All parties need to protect health and humanitarian workers.

The other interconnected issue is that of comprehensive and objective assessment of unilateral measures imposed by countries on Syria. Such measures only aggravate the prevailing economic, humanitarian and development crisis, with devastating effects for the entire population, particularly women, children and the elderly.

We also underscore the importance of the active engagement of the United Nations with Syria towards implementation of the United Nations strategic framework to achieve the outcomes that have been set out.



For its part, India continues to stand shoulder-to-shoulder with the people of Syria in this grave hour of need. Earlier this month, responding to the request for emergency humanitarian assistance from the Syrian Government, India delivered more than 2,000 metric tons of rice for the people of Syria through the port city of Latakia. We shared more than 10 metric tons of medicines for the people of Syria in July 2020 to help them through the COVID-19 pandemic. We stand ready to work with the United Nations and its agencies to ensure that “Made in India” vaccines, in keeping with the clarion call of our Prime Minister for vaccines for all, can also be brought to the aid and assistance of the people of Syria.

As regards our development partnership with Syria, India has extended \$265 million in soft loans for projects in the steel and power sector and \$12 million in humanitarian assistance to the Government of Syria through both bilateral and multilateral channels. India has also set up a biotechnology park and an information technology centre. Keeping the conflict in mind, we also organized an artificial limb-fitment camp in Damascus in 2019-2020, which benefited over 500 Syrians. Given the education crisis pointed out by the briefer, allow me to mention that India has extended 1,000 scholarships to Syrian students for higher education in India. Those have been welcomed and are already benefiting Syrian youth.

In conclusion, I reiterate my country’s commitment to supporting Syria and its people in these challenging times.

## Annex VII

### Statement by the Permanent Representative of Ireland to the United Nations, Geraldine Byrne Nason

I make this statement today on behalf of the co-penholders of the Syrian humanitarian file, Ireland and Norway. We would like to thank Under-Secretary-General Mark Lowcock for his briefing today. We are also very grateful for the presence of our civil society briefer, Sonia Khush of Save the Children, and for the insights she has just shared with us.

Next month will mark 10 long years of conflict in Syria, a conflict that has driven widespread suffering for the Syrian people and created a deeply embedded humanitarian crisis, underscored by a shattered economy and deeply degraded health and education systems.

Over the past 10 years, this Council has heard many harrowing reports. Each time, we imagine things could hardly get worse. However, the Secretary-General tells us that humanitarian needs have increased by one-fifth in the past year alone.

A record 12.4 million Syrians, 60 per cent of the population, are being denied their most basic right to food, struggling to find enough food to eat, and, as we heard, child malnutrition is rapidly increasing.

Harsh winter conditions have coincided with rising fuel prices, making basic heating out of reach for many Syrians. Tragically, lives continue to be lost among Syria's most vulnerable in fires resulting from efforts to keep warm.

The dreadful conditions caused by flooding in the north-east have added to the hardship for 141,000 displaced persons, as tents and schools have been destroyed, demonstrating once again the fragility of the situation and the imperative of ensuring that help can reach those most in need.

We recognize the disproportionate impact that these conditions, and the ongoing conflict and violence, have on women and on children. The misery endured by Syrian civilians is unimaginable for most of us.

We are alarmed by the conflict-related sexual violence against children in Syria. This has had devastating consequences for these children, for their communities and for society at large. All parties to the conflict must take immediate and specific measures to end this scourge and comply with international humanitarian law and human rights law.

The threat of coronavirus disease (COVID-19) further adds to the urgency of protecting access to water and sanitation. It is crucial that the health-care system across Syria be supported in battling the pandemic. All parties must facilitate humanitarian access and uphold ceasefires to enable humanitarian medical teams to undertake their vital functions, including safely delivering COVID-19 vaccinations to those who need them most.

As humanitarian penholders, we are keenly aware of the necessity to ensure that humanitarian assistance reach all Syrians in need. We are also aware of the depth and breadth of humanitarian need across Syria and the complex challenge they present to life-saving — and life-sustaining — humanitarian operations.

We must do everything in our power to support these operations, both by providing funding and by ensuring that humanitarian actors can carry out their work, utilizing all necessary modalities, and with the necessary support. All parties must allow rapid, safe and unimpeded access — humanitarian access — to all people in need, wherever they are located, in line with the humanitarian principles of independence, impartiality and neutrality.

We offer our deep condolences to the family of the humanitarian health worker killed last week in Al-Bab city. At least 14 humanitarian workers have been killed in Syria in the last 14 months.

We are deeply troubled by the ongoing violence across Syria, which continues to cause deaths and injuries, and we condemn all violence against civilians. The latest toll we have for December to January counts 67 people who lost their lives, among them 17 children. We call on all parties to enter into a nationwide ceasefire, in line with resolution 2254 (2015).

Shelling and violence in the north-east, at Ain Issa, has forced 3,000 people to leave their homes, all the while life-saving humanitarian deliveries have been delayed due to bureaucratic impediments.

We are very concerned about the deteriorating security situation at the Al-Hol camp, as reported by the Secretary-General this month, where 23 people are reported to have been killed since 1 January. This situation is particularly worrying given that over half of the residents in the camp are aged under 12.

We remind all parties, in the strongest terms, of their obligations under international law, including international humanitarian law and international human rights law, with regard to the protection of civilians, and we reiterate the call of the Secretary-General for an immediate cessation of hostilities.

Let me close as I began, casting an eye over 10 years of conflict and looking to the future. We cannot face another 10 years of human suffering driven by conflict. This Council has a responsibility to stand together in solidarity with those who find themselves without a voice.

## Annex VIII

### Statement by the Permanent Representative of Kenya to the United Nations, Martin Kimani

I thank Under-Secretary-General Mark Lowcock and Sonia Khush for their briefings on the humanitarian situation in Syria. I also welcome the new Permanent Representative of Syria.

It is unfortunate that the dire humanitarian situation in Syria, marked by the untold and seemingly unending suffering of the innocent, peace-loving people of Syria, including vulnerable groups, especially the elderly, women and children, has persisted against the backdrop of protracted violent conflict. This Council has a vital duty to engage on and prioritize the needs of the Syrian people, whose situation is not improving despite the Council having deliberated over Syria for a decade.

We note with concern the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs' estimate that 13 million people remain in need of humanitarian assistance within Syria, excluding the millions of refugees in the region. This calls for more rigorous and urgent action to alleviate suffering.

Kenya's firm belief is that there should be no limitation to the delivery of aid. Indeed, it is critical that all the opposing parties cooperate in ensuring timely, safe, sustained and unimpeded access for the United Nations and all humanitarian partners to people in need across the Syrian Arab Republic. We therefore support the effective distribution of cross-border humanitarian aid and the need for strengthened, robust and unimpeded cross-line aid in order to reach more and more people and mitigate their unnecessary suffering.

It is no secret that the dismal humanitarian situation is being exacerbated by Syria's deteriorating economic conditions, as well as the ongoing food insecurity. That is evidenced by the inability of citizens to feed their families because they cannot afford to buy standard food baskets, whose prices remain beyond their reach. It is heartbreaking that many children are malnourished, while others are unable to go to school, as they have to help their families by working for food.

I reaffirm Kenya's position against the use of unilateral coercive measures, as they continue to have an undeniable negative impact that impedes the full realization of social and economic development, as well as the overall well-being of the population in Syria.

Furthermore, the imperative for the protection of civilians and humanitarian workers cannot be overstated. We are concerned that humanitarian workers are regularly targeted in north-western and north-eastern Syria by the Islamic State of Iraq and the Sham and local armed groups using bombs and improvised explosive devices, resulting in fatalities and a growing fear among humanitarian workers. We condemn those attacks, and we convey our condolences to the affected.

Kenya welcomes the Secretary-General's announcement of the establishment of a three-person independent senior advisory panel to strengthen the deconfliction mechanism in order to avoid potential hazards for humanitarian personnel, thereby lowering the incidence of attacks on schools, hospitals and camps.

Kenya's delegation believes that sustainable peace goes hand in hand with development. A development-oriented approach will help build the resilience of individuals, communities and institutions, enabling them to cope better with their situation and reduce the longer-term need for humanitarian aid.

In that regard, the Security Council should start laying emphasis on a resilience-based humanitarian response to the crisis in Syria that includes the reconstruction

of critical infrastructure, such as schools and hospitals, undertaking economic recovery and job creation programmes targeting young people and implementing social cohesion measures.

In conclusion, we challenge all parties to the conflict to adhere to international humanitarian law for the protection and fulfilment of humanitarian assistance and for the return of international norms. I reiterate Kenya's unequivocal support for a Syrian-led and Syrian-owned political dialogue as the only approach that will lead to a sustainable solution to the conflict in Syria.

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**Annex IX****Statement by the Permanent Representative of Mexico to the United Nations, Juan Ramón de la Fuente Ramírez**

[Original: Spanish]

I thank Under-Secretary-General Mark Lowcock and Ms. Sonia Khush for their briefings. We welcome the new representative of the Syrian Arab Republic.

A few days after 10 years of conflict in Syria, the population continues to suffer from the consequences of violence and a lack of stability. We could say that the current humanitarian situation is a cumulative reflection of 10 years of war. Its effects are profound and devastating, as evidenced by the alarming figures reported in terms of food insecurity, the number of displaced people and damaged infrastructure.

The civilian population continues to pay a high price for the hostilities. Since our last meeting on the situation in Syria in January (see S/2021/75), there have been new incidents of violence, some involving improvised explosive devices in densely populated areas, resulting in the deaths of civilians, including at least 17 children. Humanitarian aid workers have also suffered losses, as we heard.

Mexico condemns in the strongest terms those acts of violence, and we reiterate our call on all parties to respect the ceasefire and comply with their obligations under international humanitarian law. A comprehensive ceasefire is a priority, and it must be accompanied by a genuine effort to reach a comprehensive political solution.

In north-eastern Syria, in Al-Hol camp, more than 60,000 people, 94 per cent of them women and children, live in extremely precarious conditions. In recent months, violence has increased and at least 23 killings have been recorded. We join the call for the prompt repatriation of those families in accordance with international law and to pay particular attention to their reintegration in their countries of origin.

Meanwhile, as we heard, malnutrition rates have also increased. Their short- and long-term effects on the physical and mental development of those affected are another compelling reason to maintain and improve all channels for humanitarian access, which have been insufficient to date. Keeping the Bab Al-Hawa crossing open is vital to getting humanitarian assistance into north-western Syria and cannot be replaced by cross-line crossings. That is confirmed by information provided by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and other humanitarian agencies on the ground.

We therefore call for the streamlining of procedures regarding the flow of humanitarian assistance from Damascus, starting by reducing project approval times. The effectiveness of both those channels is critical in the current pandemic context, as the need for medical supplies has predictably increased. Timely and unimpeded humanitarian access will also be indispensable for the implementation of the coronavirus disease vaccination plans.

We call on all States that have imposed unilateral sanctions on Syria to continuously and rigorously verify that they do not affect the civilian population.

Finally, we urge all members of the Security Council to focus their discussions on the humanitarian situation in Syria, leaving aside political considerations. The lives of countless people depend on that.

**Annex X****Statement by the Deputy Permanent Representative of the Niger to the United Nations, Niandou Aougi**

[Original: English and French]

At the outset, I would like to thank Mr. Mark Lowcock and Ms. Sonia Khush for their very edifying presentations on the humanitarian situation in Syria.

The Niger salutes the daily efforts of humanitarian organizations that continue, without respite, to help people in need throughout Syria. The information that those organizations bring to our attention portrays a humanitarian situation that is becoming increasingly worrisome, with many women and children as victims.

The deterioration of the Syrian economy due to the war and the devaluation of the Syrian pound further complicates the already precarious living conditions of the population. Consequently, that led to shortages and soaring prices of some basic necessities, including food, which many Syrian families are struggling to procure. In that regard, let me emphasize a few points.

First, the Niger reiterates that the cessation of hostilities remains an essential condition for achieving tangible progress in resolving the crisis in Syria. The continued fighting, bombings and use of improvised explosive devices remain a real source of concern for us. We support the calls of the Secretary-General and his Special Envoy for an immediate national ceasefire in Syria in order to create conditions for a successful political process and help make effective the fight against the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, whose spread is increasing exponentially in the country.

Nevertheless, my delegation wishes to stress that the call for a ceasefire and the need for a common and collective effort to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic should not distract us from the fight against terrorism, especially since many facts show that terrorist groups are trying to take advantage of the current situation in order to reconstitute themselves and regain lost ground. However, that fight must be carried out in accordance with international humanitarian law and with due regard for the protection of innocent civilians and their access to humanitarian assistance.

Secondly, we commend the efforts of the Syrian Government with regard to its continued collaboration with the United Nations and other organizations, as well as in the fight against the spread of the pandemic and in ensuring the delivery of humanitarian assistance throughout Syria. In that regard, we call for better coordination between humanitarians and the Syrian Government in the distribution of that aid.

We also welcome the authorizations given by the Syrian authorities to organizations to enable them to deliver humanitarian aid. That must continue and even be stepped up, especially when it comes to food and medical equipment. My delegation echoes the Secretary-General's appeal to the belligerents to allow and facilitate the rapid and unimpeded passage of humanitarian assistance to all civilians in need, wherever they may be.

Thirdly, we deplore the destruction of many internally displaced persons camps and schools by high winds and floods. That deteriorating situation resulted in the displacement of thousands of displaced persons, some of whom are already internally displaced persons. We call on the Syrian authorities and humanitarian organizations to show a greater commitment in that regard.

In the same vein, we deplore the deterioration of the security and living conditions at the Al-Hol camp. We call on the opposing forces and the United



Nations to enhance the security of the residents of the Al-Hol camp and to ensure that security is provided in a manner that does not further endanger the residents or limit the provision of humanitarian assistance.

Fourthly, the Niger remains concerned about the fate of many civilians, notably humanitarian workers and media professionals, as well as women and children, who are arbitrarily detained in both camps. We call on the parties to the conflict to respect human rights, share information on the fate of the detainees, report on the fate and whereabouts of those detained and allow humanitarian and human rights agencies access to the places of detention.

Finally, my delegation urges the belligerents to comply with the calls made by the Secretary-General and his Special Envoy for a massive and unilateral release of detainees, as well as for meaningful action on the case of missing persons.

In conclusion, the dire consequences of the collapse of Syria's economy will affect Syrians in both Government-controlled and non-Government-controlled areas without discrimination. My delegation therefore urges the countries concerned to actively respond to the appeal made by the Secretary-General last March for the removal, or easing, of the sanctions imposed on countries in crisis in order to ensure access to food and essential medical supplies to combat the pandemic.

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

[Original: Russian]

We thank Mark Lowcock for his briefing and for presenting his perspective of the humanitarian situation in Syria. We also thank Ms. Sonia Khush for her briefing. We would like to welcome the newly arrived Permanent Representative of the Syrian Arab Republic to the United Nations, Ambassador Bassam Sabbagh, to today's meeting.

Unfortunately, in his briefing the humanitarian coordinator did not address all the factors that affect the humanitarian situation in Syria. In particular, when speaking of reasons for the deteriorating economic situation, we did not hear him refer to the illegal unilateral restrictions imposed by our Western colleagues, whereas it is precisely those restrictions that are preventing the Syrian economy from recovering despite all the efforts of the authorities. Above all, that affects ordinary Syrians, who urgently need access to adequate social services in the areas of health care and education and the restoration of war-torn civil infrastructure. The humanitarian assistance coming into the country can neither solve those problems nor bring life in Syria back to normal. The humanitarian exemptions are also not working, which is confirmed by the humanitarian agencies on the ground. We have repeatedly mentioned the conclusions of the United Nations Special Rapporteur, Ms. Douhan, regarding the impact of sanctions on the enjoyment of human rights. Her findings provided the basis for collective letters addressed to President Biden and Prime Minister Johnson, which contained a request to lift sanctions against Syria. The letters, signed by more than 90 people, were sent at the end of January this year. Among the signatories were not only representatives of academia and the clergy, journalists and humanitarian workers, but also former Ambassadors of the United Kingdom, Germany, Tunisia and France to Syria, as well as an incumbent member of the United Kingdom House of Lords. Regarding sanctions, the letter says that there is "a growing consensus among the human rights and humanitarian communities that this form of collective punishment of the civilian population is driving Syria into an unprecedented humanitarian catastrophe".

Due to the indirect influence of sanctions, Damascus cannot conduct the foreign exchange transactions that are needed to ensure that the economy works and purchase raw materials and construction materials on foreign markets, not to mention the medications and medical equipment that are so badly needed amid a pandemic. We hope that the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs is aware of that.

As the Council knows, the Gavi Alliance has endorsed two bids for supplying vaccines against the coronavirus disease to Syria. One of the applications was submitted by the Government. We are sure that Damascus will dispatch a portion of the vaccines to the non-Government-controlled territories in the north-east, as was the case with medical supplies last year. I should recall that since May 2020, six ground convoys with medical supplies have been sent to the Euphrates region with the consent of Damascus and a further 13 shipments were delivered to Qamishli by air. More than 90 per cent of those deliveries were sent to medical facilities in non-Government-controlled areas that had previously been supplied through the Al-Yarubiyah border crossing. There are more than 100 of them.

However, we have never heard our Western partners in the Security Council welcome those efforts by Damascus. Nor have we heard words condemning the

terrorists who control Idlib and have prevented a humanitarian convoy of the United Nations, the Syrian Arab Red Crescent and the International Committee of the Red Cross from entering the enclave for almost a year now despite the fact that, according to United Nations estimates, Idlib has the largest number of starving people in Syria, one in three of whom is a child, and food prices there are 26 per cent higher than the country's average.

We should in fact be asking the question: what is going on in Idlib? With record deliveries through the cross-border mechanism, why does north-western Syria have one of the highest starvation rates? Where does all the assistance on which donors spend millions go to? It is common knowledge that the terrorists in Idlib are getting rich. At the same time, we have never heard and are not likely to hear donor States request ask the United Nations to give an account of the results of its work. It appears that Idlib is the place where the cross-border mechanism shows its false bottom. There is little doubt that to preserve the cross-border mechanism would mean to preserve a channel of financial support for terrorists who feed off extortion money and smuggling. That means that ordinary Syrians have to get by on the plunderers' crumbs, with no opportunity to make a living or ensure even a remotely decent future for their children.

When it comes to delivering vaccines from Gavi Alliance stocks, as the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in Gaziantep has arranged, we would therefore be interested to learn how equitable the distribution of vaccines is going to be in the north-west. The Permanent Representative of France and the Deputy Permanent Representative of the United States have suggested that we exert pressure on the Syrian authorities to have vaccination start in Syria — as if Damascus were against it. In that regard, we cannot ignore the issue of sanctions, which could seriously hamper Syria's efforts to arrange vaccine deliveries to Government-controlled areas and ensure its subsequent storage. What logistics company will risk getting involved in the sanctions machinery? How is the Government supposed to restore uninterrupted electric power supply to ensure, among other things, that cooling equipment for vaccine storage works 24/7 if the required equipment and spare parts cannot be purchased abroad?

We still have reservations about the United States occupying Syria's north-east and appropriating its oil resources. Deliberate general neglect of this toxic episode casts a shadow on the authority of our Security Council partners and calls into question Syria's territorial integrity, which is affirmed in resolution 2254 (2015).

It was the Russian military that cleared a corridor for humanitarian deliveries to Al-Hasakah. What have the United States occupying forces, the champions of humanism, done?

In conclusion, we must say in all seriousness that if we were to decide tomorrow on renewing the cross-border mechanism, we are afraid that we would have no compelling reasons to preserve it. Those interested in extending the mechanism should understand that there is little time left and a lot to do by July. Half-measures will not work; it is vital to begin domestic Syrian deliveries of humanitarian assistance to Idlib and to ensure that they are carried out on a regular basis.

I would now like to return to Mr. Lowcock's answers to our questions. But before I do that, I must say that we were surprised to hear our colleague from the United States assert that we prevented a briefer from participating in this video-teleconference. We have nothing against the briefer in question; we simply thought that it would be enough to have just one civil society representative. The briefer we proposed for this meeting would have been much more relevant. I also note that, not long ago, several of our colleagues — including from the United States — prevented our proposed briefers from appearing before the Council.

Mr. Lowcock only partially answered the questions we had submitted in advance. Here are the ones he left unanswered. Are there any obstacles to carrying out the work in Syria that would fall under the development-humanitarian action nexus? If so, then what are they and what needs to be done to overcome them? What is the difference between the Inter-Agency Task Force and the United Nations country team? What is the composition and what are the functions of said Task Force?

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

I thank Under Secretary-General Lowcock and Ms. Khush for their briefings.

After a decade of conflict, Syria's humanitarian situation remains a cause for considerable alarm, as humanitarian needs are rising steeply across the country. Regrettably, the crisis has been exacerbated by severe weather conditions and the country's continued economic downturn, which has left millions food insecure and facing malnutrition. Unquestionably, the provision of timely, safe, sustained and unimpeded humanitarian assistance, in line with humanitarian principles, must remain a top priority and should be scaled up, where possible, by utilizing all available modalities.

The global pandemic has further compounded the country's complex humanitarian emergency and necessitates urgent action. We note that Syria's request to secure coronavirus disease vaccines from the Coronavirus Disease Vaccine Global Access Facility has been accepted. It is our hope that the vaccine roll-out will begin shortly and that they will be administered efficiently. We echo the appeal for the lifting of all unilateral coercive measures, which are incompatible with international law, thwart socioeconomic recovery and hinder the country's efforts to combat the pandemic.

The continuation of hostilities serves as yet another factor that intensifies the humanitarian crisis. It is crucial that the parties to the conflict exercise maximum restraint and immediately end the violence in order to protect civilians and civilian infrastructure, prevent further displacement and allow humanitarian actors to effectively carry out their work. Indeed, a sustained nationwide ceasefire will also cultivate the necessary conditions for much-needed reconstruction. In that regard, we continue to encourage the international community to contribute to the restoration of schools, medical facilities and other essential services in order to help alleviate the humanitarian situation by reducing vulnerabilities and promoting overall development.

We are becoming increasingly concerned about the deteriorating security situation in displacement camps, particularly Al-Hol. Those residing and working in such camps must be afforded protection and access to basic necessities.

We recognize that counter-terrorism operations are required to protect Syria's people, sovereignty and territorial integrity. However, we remind parties of their obligation to comply with international law. Military objectives should never take precedence over the protection of civilians, and all activities must respect the principles of distinction, proportionality and precaution. Impunity for violations of international law should not be tolerated.

The political and humanitarian situations are undoubtedly interwoven and the only resolution to the conflict and protracted humanitarian crisis is through the full implementation of resolution 2254 (2015). Peace, prosperity and stability can return to Syria with the positive engagement and support of the entire international community.

**Annex XIII****Statement by the Permanent Representative of Tunisia to the United Nations, Tarek Ladeb**

[Original: Arabic]

I should like to thank the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, Mr. Mark Lowcock, for his comprehensive briefing. I also thank Ms. Sonia Khush, representative of civil society, for her briefing. I welcome His Excellency Ambassador Bassam Sabbagh, the new Permanent Representative of the Syrian Arab Republic, as well as the participation of the representatives of the Islamic Republic of Iran and Turkey at this meeting.

At the outset, I would like to reiterate my country's position that there is no alternative to reaching a political settlement in Syria in accordance with resolution 2254 (2015) and that efforts must be made to hasten a settlement in order to end the human suffering of Syrians and place the country on a path to stability and sustainable peace. In the meantime, the scope of humanitarian assistance must continue to be expanded throughout Syria in order to meet the growing needs and mitigate the impact of the threats that have been exacerbated by a decade of conflict, the deteriorating economic situation and the repercussions of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic.

We are deeply concerned about the unprecedented deterioration in humanitarian crisis indicators in Syria, as noted in the report (S/2021/160) of the Secretary-General. The crisis has affected the nutritional, health-related and educational welfare of Syrians, especially the most vulnerable among them, women and children in particular.

Overall calm remains a distant goal, in view of the increase in violence, tensions and terrorism in several parts of Syria. Persistent ceasefire violations, especially during the recent period, continue to claim the lives of innocent civilians and medical and humanitarian workers, thereby undermining efforts to alleviate the humanitarian crisis.

We reiterate that it is vital to establish a sustainable ceasefire throughout the country, in line with the call made by the Secretary-General and his Special Envoy. We urge all the parties to adhere to international law and international humanitarian law and strive to ensure that civilians, civilian and medical facilities and medical and humanitarian workers are protected.

We reiterate that it is incumbent upon all parties to commit to facilitating the safe, prompt and unhindered delivery of humanitarian and medical assistance to those in need through the various available access routes. Given that the humanitarian situation is delicate, all parties on the ground must work constructively to facilitate humanitarian access and prioritize humanitarian relief over any other considerations. We commend the improved system for the granting of permits by Damascus to United Nations missions inside Syria over the past year, and we urge the Syrian Government to maintain that approach and further support it.

We welcome the progress made in containing the pandemic by taking steps to vaccinate approximately one fifth of the Syrian population against COVID-19 by the second quarter through the COVID-19 Vaccine Global Access Facility. That initiative provides a glimmer of hope for curbing the death toll and restoring some semblance of normalcy to life in Syria. In that connection, we stress that access to vaccines must be fair and non-discriminatory and that it must be extended to the most vulnerable areas in Syria.

Lastly, we reiterate that it would be useful if early recovery efforts could be promoted and if humanitarian and development projects and programmes could be more thoroughly integrated to include the maintenance of hospitals, schools, roads, the water supply, electricity and sanitation, while providing decent and sustainable livelihoods for the affected and most vulnerable groups, thereby improving the prospects of a better life for Syrians.



**Annex XIV****Statement by the Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the United Nations, Barbara Woodward**

I would like to thank Under-Secretary-General Mark Lowcock for his briefing. I also thank Sonia Khush for her first-hand analysis and, through her, Save the Children for its life-saving work. I would like to register the United Kingdom's disappointment that Su'ad Jarbawi, of the International Rescue Committee, was not able to brief the Council today on the realities of aid delivery in the north-west, due to an objection from another Council member.

As the Secretary-General sets out in his latest report (S/2021/160), the Syrian population has entered 2021 amid some of the most challenging humanitarian conditions experienced over the past 10 years of conflict. An unprecedented 12.4 million people are food insecure — an increase of 4.5 million people in just one year. As we heard today, children are bearing the brunt of this crisis, with one in eight children now stunted as a result of malnutrition.

Millions of people in north-western Syria depend on cross-border assistance; cross-line access is no substitute. The situation is now more acute due to torrential rains and flooding in the north-west. Aid running through Bab Al-Hawa has never been more important.

In north-eastern Syria, cross-line aid delivery from Damascus has failed to fill the gaps left by the closure of the Al-Yarubiyah crossing. The prevention of humanitarian food distribution by bureaucratic impediments or due to tensions between armed actors in the north-east shows that we cannot rely on cross-line modalities alone. The Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs has told the Council, on at least five occasions since June 2020, that cross-line assistance is not delivering at the scale or frequency needed to meet humanitarian needs.

The claim put forth by the Syrian authorities and the Russian Federation — that cross-line access is enough to meet the humanitarian needs of three-quarters of the population — is untenable, as is the claim that the West is somehow to blame.

As a first step, we urge the United Nations to provide comprehensive details of what types of assistance are being delivered and where the greatest gaps lie.

The rationale for renewing the cross-border mandate in July has not diminished. To quote the Secretary-General, “[m]ore access is needed”, not less. We heard the clear message this morning from the representative of Save the Children that “there is no other way to sustainably program for millions of people without the cross-border resolution”. The Council must do everything in its power to ensure that this vital assistance continues.

## Annex XV

**Statement by the Deputy Permanent Representative of the United States of America to the United Nations, Richard Mills**

I thank Under-Secretary-General Lowcock for his briefing. I also want to offer my sincere appreciation for the powerful report from our civil society briefer, Sonia Khush. The dedication of the thousands of humanitarians working in Syria is quite laudable, and I wish to thank them, and you, Sonia, for your service.

I had also hoped to be able to thank Su'ad Jarbawi, from the International Rescue Committee. Su'ad is an extraordinary civil society leader who was invited to speak to the Council today. Sadly, our Russian colleagues silenced her and blocked her from appearing today. Had she been here, I expect she would have delivered a simple message to all of us: New York must act. The Council needs to ensure that civilians in Syria have access to humanitarian aid, including through cross-border operations. In future, I do hope our Russian colleagues will accord greater respect to women, like Su'ad, who lead civil society organizations.

It is important that we continue to have these difficult and honest conversations about the suffering endured by the Syrian people because of the actions of the Al-Assad regime and its enablers.

Today I want to focus on three main points: why humanitarian access must reach all in need, why cross-border access must continue and why, especially as the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) plagues Syrians and the rest of the world, the Council has to stand up to its obligations to help the most vulnerable.

Every Syrian deserves assistance. That is why the United States has given more than \$12.2 billion in humanitarian assistance since 2012 to help any Syrian who requires aid, solely based on their needs.

For close to one and half years, people in the Rukban camp have been without medical aid because the Al-Assad regime and Russia will not allow the United Nations to make deliveries to that informal encampment. We urge the Al-Assad regime and Russia to allow unhindered humanitarian access to the camp in Rukban, including to United Nations humanitarian delivery convoys. This kind of politicizing and weaponizing of aid should outrage us all.

And while we have talked about it a lot, we need to keep repeating it as others have: the cross-border mechanism is vital to ensuring that humanitarian aid continues to reach people in need. It is our responsibility as the Council to expand humanitarian access this July when the cross-border mandate is up for renewal, not to further restrict it. Further limiting access would have additional catastrophic consequences for the 3.5 million Syrians in the north-west, many of whom have been internally displaced multiple times and whose lives depend on aid.

Reauthorization for the United Nations to use Bab Al-Hawa remains the only way to ensure the consistent delivery of food, shelter and medical supplies. All of us here know full well, however, that one crossing point does not meet the vast needs of the Syrian people. We know that in the past six months, our increased dependence on this one point — owing to the loss of Bab Al-Salam last July — has led, as we have heard, to shortages of food and access to sanitation and shelter. That in turn has led to higher rates of malnutrition and sickness, with deaths on the rise. We are hearing this not just from the United States but from our briefers, from experts in the United Nations and from the Secretary-General. The United Nations must be allowed unhindered access to all areas of Syria in order to meet the life-sustaining needs of millions of Syrians.

Of course, we are deeply concerned about the continued risk of COVID-19, as it poses a grave threat to internally displaced persons and other vulnerable groups across Syria. Given the limited testing capacity, the poor access to health care and the short supply of resources to take preventive steps nationwide, we encourage all actors to work together to develop an equitable and efficient vaccination plan that covers all Syrians. We must also acknowledge the critical role that increased cross-border access would play in delivering the vaccine in both north-west and north-east Syria.

Sustained, meaningful access to all those affected by the COVID-19 crisis is required to build trust and vaccine acceptance for all Syrians and to deliver vaccines efficiently. As we have said, that is just one more reason why the United Nations cross-border authorization remains vital. We are gravely concerned that those left behind in north-east Syria without a cross-border entry point will continue to be unjustly denied vaccines by the Al-Assad regime. We also remain deeply concerned about the tens of thousands of Syrians trapped in squalid conditions in regime detention facilities, who must also benefit from an efficient vaccination plan.

Cross-line assistance shipments — as they have for years now — continue to be regularly blocked, delayed or rerouted to regime-controlled areas. The Al-Assad regime and its enablers must permit life-saving cross-line assistance to proceed without interference. And we as the Council need to ensure that other avenues are open when and where cross-line deliveries are not working.

In conclusion, it is also critical that all United Nations agencies in Syria act consistently with the United Nations parameters and principles for assistance, as the humanitarian needs in Syria have not been met and corruption in that regime continues and cannot be rewarded. Syria remains, sadly, a country at war.

As Secretary Blinken underscored earlier this month, the United States remains committed to the international community's long-standing, comprehensive and sustained efforts to bring a political solution to the conflict in Syria.

We want, again, to condemn all attacks that have killed or injured aid workers and destroyed their facilities, and we call on all parties to the conflict to respect international humanitarian law.

The Security Council should do everything possible to ensure that all Syrians receive the humanitarian assistance they need to survive.

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**Annex XVI****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 also thank Ms. Sonia Khush for sharing her views.

I would also like to welcome the participation of the representatives of Syria, Turkey and Iran in today's meeting.

My delegation takes note with concern of the humanitarian situation in Syria as set out in the latest report of the Secretary-General (S/2021/160) and the further updates by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs today.

The predicament of millions of Syrian people continues without a sustainable exit in sight. Aggravated by the economic crisis and the impact of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19), the situation could deteriorate even further.

According to the World Food Programme, 12.4 million people, that is, about 60 per cent of the population, lack access to adequate food. There has also been a massive increase in the number of people facing severe food insecurity, which has doubled to 1.3 million in just one year. The cost of food continues to rise and shortages of basic goods to increase. We have recently seen acute food crises in many countries, and the combined effect can put a great deal of stress on supplies and relief efforts. If that issue cannot be addressed effectively, the authorities and relief agencies might end up having to choose whom to save and whom to leave behind.

In addition, instability continued in various parts of Syria, claiming innocent lives and hampering humanitarian and health-care services. It has also impacted educational and health-care facilities in the north-east, as reported.

The multifaceted impact of the current crisis on the plight of vulnerable groups all over Syria, especially children, is tremendous and distressing to witness.

With respect to humanitarian access, our delegation notes with encouragement that various obstacles due to COVID-19-related restrictions have been tackled and that humanitarian assistance continues to reach people in need across all 14 governorates.

We are nevertheless concerned over the lack of agreement among parties, which has led to limited access to some parts of the country. We therefore call on all parties to the conflict and the United Nations to enhance their cooperation in order to ensure the unhindered passage of humanitarian relief for people in need. We encourage the parties to continue their efforts to establish access to the north-west from inside Syria, with a view to scaling up the humanitarian response in that area.

Regarding the humanitarian response, Viet Nam warmly welcomes the effort of the various United Nations agencies, international partners and donors in providing support for the Syrian people throughout the country. We would like to pay special tribute to all humanitarian workers for their important contributions given the serious challenges on the ground. We call on the relevant United Nations agencies, donors and humanitarian organizations to address the food crises around the world in a holistic manner in order to help the hungry and prevent further crises.

In the light of the second wave of COVID-19 infections, we reiterate the importance of assisting the enhancement of Syria's COVID-19 preparedness and response capability. We support the appeal made by the Secretary-General for the waiving of sanctions that are hindering the humanitarian response to the pandemic.

We take positive note of the fact that a plan for COVID-19 vaccination in Syria is now being developed and look forward to its realization in the near future.

Our delegation would also like to call on all parties concerned to find timely and sustained solutions to the issues reported regarding the dire situation in various camps for internally displaced persons, including the water shortage caused by the disruption of the Allouk station.

To conclude, we call on the international community to continue its important support for the Syrian people during this critical moment.

In the long run, the greater the magnitude of the humanitarian crisis, the more vitally important it is to find a sustainable settlement of the situation in Syria. It is our strong belief that the only way to achieve that is through facilitating a comprehensive and inclusive political solution, led and owned by the Syrians, in line with resolution 2254 (2015) and in full accordance with international law.

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**Annex XVII****Statement by the Deputy Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the United Nations, Eshagh Al Habib**

For 10 years, the Syrian people have suffered terribly from the brutal attacks by foreign-backed terrorists and an illegal occupation, and, in recent years, from inhumane sanctions.

The international community has a responsibility to help the Syrian people and Government to overcome the crisis and to ensure Syria's unity, sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence.

In that context, we call for the immediate withdrawal of all foreign forces that are present in Syria without the permission of its Government.

These and other aspects of the Syrian crisis have been extensively discussed at the Astana format meeting held recently in Sochi, Russia, following which a joint statement was issued by Iran, Russia and Turkey. The three countries condemned the increasing terrorist activities in Syria and agreed to continue cooperation to ultimately eliminate Da'esh, the Al-Nusra Front and all other Security Council-designated terrorist groups and their affiliates.

They also expressed serious concern over the increased presence and terrorist activity of Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham and other affiliated terrorist groups and the threat that they pose to civilians inside and outside the Idlib de-escalation area. In that context, we express serious concern over the attempts to exonerate certain terrorist groups with the ultimate goal of their delisting.

Likewise, they rejected all attempts to create new realities on the ground, including illegitimate self-rule initiatives, under the pretext of combating terrorism, and also reaffirmed their opposition to the illegal seizure and transfer of oil revenues that should belong to the Syrian Arab Republic.

They also condemned the continued Israeli military attacks in Syria in violation of international law, which undermine the sovereignty of Syria and neighbouring countries as well as endanger stability and security in the region, and they called for the cessation of such attacks. The international community must halt the military adventurism of the Israeli regime before it reaches to an uncontrollable level.

On the political process, they emphasized the important role of the Constitutional Committee, reaffirmed their support for its work, emphasized the importance of ensuring respect for its terms of reference and rules of procedure, and stressed that the Committee's work should be governed by a sense of compromise and constructive engagement without foreign interference or externally imposed timelines.

The Astana guarantors also expressed grave concern at the humanitarian situation in Syria, rejected all unilateral sanctions, and, recognizing the coronavirus disease pandemic as a profound challenge to Syria's socioeconomic and humanitarian situations, called upon the wider United Nations system to prioritize vaccination inside Syria.

The application of unilateral sanctions against the Syrian people only further exacerbates the situation and prolongs both the crisis and the suffering of the people. Such sanctions are unlawful, inhumane and unjustifiable and must therefore come to an immediate end.

Given the important role that the improvement of the humanitarian situation can play in advancing the political settlement, they called upon the international

community to enhance assistance to Syria, including for the restoration of basic infrastructure assets such as hospitals and water and power-supply facilities.

They also highlighted the need to facilitate the safe and voluntary return of refugees and internally displaced persons to their original places of residence in Syria and called upon the international community to provide appropriate contributions to that end.

The mounting political and economic pressure on Syria and the setting of multiple preconditions for the peaceful settlement of the crisis have proved counterproductive. The reconstruction of the country and the return of refugees and displaced persons must go hand in hand with the political process. They are interlinked, mutually inclusive and mutually reinforcing.

Finally, Iran reiterates its commitment to the political resolution of the crisis and will continue to support the people and the Government of Syria in their efforts to restore the unity and territorial integrity of their country.



## Annex XVIII

**Statement by the Permanent Representative of Syria to the United Nations, Bassam Sabbagh**

[Original: Arabic]

At the outset, as this is the first meeting in which I take the floor in my capacity as the new Permanent Representative of the Syrian Arab Republic, let me say that I look forward to engaging in constructive and objective discussions on the issues related to Syria being considered by the Security Council, in particular, and the United Nations, in general.

My delegation listened attentively to the briefing given by Mr. Mark Lowcock, Under-Secretary-General, on the implementation of resolutions relating to the humanitarian situation. My delegation has also reviewed the seventy-first report (S/2021/160) prepared by the Secretariat on the subject. However, we were disappointed to find that many of the facts pertaining to the humanitarian situation in Syria continue to be systematically and deliberately ignored. We had hoped that Mr. Lowcock's briefing, which might be his last, would have dispelled our disappointment.

In the years since the crisis began, the Syrian Government has cooperated earnestly and constructively with the United Nations, friendly countries and humanitarian partners, foremost among them the Syrian Arab Red Crescent and the International Committee of the Red Cross, as well as with the more than 50 foreign non-governmental organizations originally licensed to operate in Syria. That cooperation and the significant facilitation efforts made by the Syrian Government have contributed to tangible, undeniable gains in spite of the serious challenges imposed on it, chief among them the fight against terrorism, the negative impact of unilateral coercive measures and acts of aggression and occupation. The reality that will remain before us, however much some would try to obscure it, is that the United Nations and its various agencies would not have achieved any humanitarian achievements in Syria without the support and considerable facilitation efforts made by the Syrian Government.

The second fact is that the extreme politicization of humanitarian issues in Syria has effectively increased the scale of human suffering. Reports submitted to the Council that do not meet United Nations standards have made it possible for certain Member States to use those reports as a tool to politicize humanitarian affairs and divert attention from the need to tackle, in a serious and objective manner, the factors that are causing the humanitarian situation in Syria to deteriorate. Any briefings delivered or reports submitted to the Council will remain inadequate and seriously flawed as long as they continue to ignore the following fundamental challenges.

First, the crimes committed by terrorist organizations, foremost among them the terrorist organizations of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant and the Levant Liberation Organization/Al-Nusra Front and associated entities, have been ignored, as has the manner in which they exploit humanitarian assistance — especially cross-border assistance — to finance their terrorist activities, their recruitment of new members and their use of civilians in their custody as human shields in areas under their control.

For several days now, the armed terrorist groups that control Idlib governorate have been preventing residents from heading to the Saraqib-Trunbah humanitarian crossing, which the Syrian Government had opened in order to make it easier for civilians to leave Idlib and to alleviate the human suffering they have been enduring as a result of the siege imposed on them by the terrorist groups I mentioned. Those

groups fired several rounds of shells from their positions in the town of Nayrab towards the town of Saraqib in order to intimidate civilians and prevent them from heading to the humanitarian crossing. Moreover, they continue to detain more than 3,000 secondary school students and approximately 3,300 primary school students in areas under their control and to prevent the students from sitting their general examinations at official Syrian Ministry of Education examination centres.

Secondly, the disastrous effects of the unilateral coercive measures imposed on the Syrian people — measures that constitute a gross violation of international law and an act of collective punishment, as recognized by the United Nations itself — prevent Syrians from meeting their basic needs, including for food, medicine, medical supplies, electricity and fuel, limit the capacity of Syrian State institutions to respond to the additional challenges created by the coronavirus disease pandemic and impede the efforts of international organizations operating in Syria.

Thirdly, the Turkish military is occupying vast areas of Syrian territory in the north and north-west of the country and implementing a policy of Turkification by changing the names of towns and villages, altering educational curricula, mandating the use of Turkish lira in commercial transactions and confiscating the land of Syrian farmers to build the so-called separation wall. That is in addition to providing cover for terrorist organizations, including those on the Security Council's lists of terrorist organizations, to expropriate public and private property, plunder oil fields, cultural property and crops and use access to drinking water as a weapon against civilians by cutting off the supply of water 18 times from the Allouk station and depriving our people in and around Hasakah. Those grave violations should be met with condemnation, not praise.

Fourthly, American forces have occupied parts of north-east Syria. Along with their separatist militia proxies, the occupying forces have systematically plundered cultural property and oil and agricultural crops and smuggled them abroad through illegal crossings that are under their control, in addition to the recent imposition by those separatist militias of a siege strangling the city of Hasakah, resulting in a severe food and fuel shortages. The militias have even shot at civilians who were protesting against the siege and demanding the full return of State institutions to north-east Syria. In addition, the occupying American forces in the Tanf area of south-east Syria, where the Rukban camp is located, have obstructed humanitarian access to the camp and prevented its residents from returning home and ending their suffering.

Fifthly, because of the delay in addressing detainee conditions in the Al-Hol camp, pressure must be brought to bear on the Governments of certain Western States that refuse to repatriate their foreign terrorist nationals and their families. Those Governments' attempts to evade their legal responsibilities and obligations must be stopped.

In order to improve the humanitarian situation in my country, a firm commitment must be made to respect the sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity of the Syrian Arab Republic, principles underscored by all the relevant Council resolutions. Such a commitment includes refraining from illegally dispatching delegations across the border to hold meetings with terrorist organizations and separatist militias and illegal entities.

The Syrian Arab Republic once again stresses that the politicization of humanitarian work must be brought to an end, as must any attempt to impose dictates and blanket rejections intended to prevent the humanitarian and development efforts of Syrian State institutions from receiving support. Such action would allow for the voluntary return of internally and externally displaced persons.

In conclusion, my delegation reiterates that the centre of humanitarian action in Syria is the Syrian capital, Damascus, and not any other capital or city. Events that might be held here or there, including the so-called Brussels Donors Conference, are ineffective spectacles put on merely for show.

**Annex XIX****Statement by the Permanent Representative of Turkey to the United Nations, Feridun Sinirlioğlu**

I wish to thank you, Madam President, for having organized this meeting. I also thank Under-Secretary-General Lowcock and Ms. Sonia Khush for their briefings.

As we approach the tenth anniversary of the Syrian conflict, the Al-Assad regime's brutal response to the legitimate demands of the Syrian people continues. Starvation and targeted attacks by the regime and its backers have claimed countless lives. Millions of innocent people have been displaced. Tens of thousands have disappeared or have been tortured to death in the prisons of the regime.

The crisis is getting worse, with ongoing attacks and displacement combined with the economic crisis, the spread of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) and harsh winter conditions.

In its tenth year, the crisis in Syria requires more attention and action from the international community, in particular from the Security Council.

Last week, *The New York Times* correspondent who visited north-western Syria recently shared testimony depicting Turkey's pivotal role in ensuring the security and protection of the Syrian people. Turkey remains the only international force on the ground taking care of 5 million displaced and vulnerable civilians. Our presence gives hope to millions. We will never let them down.

We resolutely continue our efforts to preserve the Idlib ceasefire. That is essential to prevent another humanitarian catastrophe and a fresh migration flux with repercussions for the region as well as for Europe. We reiterate our call on the Council and the entire international community to support our efforts.

Recent images from Idlib show the destruction of thousands of tents by floods and by warplanes — warplanes commissioned to kill civilians. That is unacceptable. The world cannot turn its back on that massive humanitarian crisis. In the face of that man-made disaster of massive proportions, the Council does not have the option of inaction.

The failure of the Council last July to sustain the existing United Nations cross-border mechanism has exacerbated the already dire situation faced by 1.3 million people in northern Aleppo, as the most direct route for humanitarian aid is blocked. It would be inconceivable to add 4 million people to the number of those already deprived of basic humanitarian assistance. Stopping the humanitarian mechanism would be a deadly blow to innocent people in need, leaving them at the mercy of the Al-Assad regime.

The Council has the responsibility to protect the Syrian people. It cannot abandon them. The Council must respond to the strong call made by the General Assembly for the continuation of United Nations cross-border humanitarian assistance.

The United Nations cross-border mechanism is also the only tool for the transfer of COVID-19 vaccines to people in the north-west. It is estimated that only one fifth of the population will have received vaccines by next year.

In the joint statement following the Astana format meeting held in Sochi last week, together with Russia and Iran we called upon the United Nations to prioritize vaccination inside Syria and emphasized the need to increase humanitarian assistance throughout the country.

We will be following up on those commitments to make sure that the United Nations is not deprived of its most critical tools amid the global health crisis.

While the regime bombs its own people and starves them to death, the terrorist organization Kurdistan Workers' Party/People's Protection Units (PKK/YPG) pursues the same evil agenda by committing war crimes in northern Syria. More than 20 civilians, including children, lost their lives in attacks in Tel Abyad, I'zaz, Afrin and Al-Bab over the past weeks. In a little more than a year, PKK/YPG carried out more than 350 attacks and 70 car bombings, indiscriminately targeting civilians.

We regret the fact that some Member States continue to refrain from condemning those terrorist attacks. Those who think that they can reason and have a common agenda with terrorism are making a grave mistake. That must stop. I want to remind those Member States that there are no good terrorists. The very same terrorist organization can knock on others' doors one day. It has happened before, and it will happen again. So stop supporting PKK/YPG.

The situation in the north-east and the untenable security environment in Al-Hol camp in particular, under the de facto control of the so-called Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), reveal the failure of those narrow agendas.

The Secretary-General, in his latest report, underlines the tactics of the so-called SDF, which include blocking humanitarian aid, imposing arbitrary school curricula based on its terrorist ideology and arresting teachers.

Turkey is resolved to fight against all terrorist groups that threaten its national security and Syria's unity. We will continue without hesitation, just as we have done as an active member of the Global Coalition against Da'esh since its inception and as the only NATO country that engaged in chest-to-chest combat against Da'esh. Those who ignore the atrocities committed by the PKK/YPG under the pretext of countering Da'esh, on the other hand, undermine their own credibility in the fight against terrorism.

Every month, on several occasions we listen to numerous misrepresentations and lies by the representative of the regime. It continues in full swing, as we have just heard, but to no avail. Those lies will not stop us from telling the truth, and we will continue to support the legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people and their right to unhindered humanitarian assistance.

As to the statement made by the regime representative, I do not consider him as my legitimate counterpart and therefore will not honour him with a response.

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