



Security Council

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Letter dated 1 July 2020 from the President of the Security Council addressed to the Secretary-General and the Permanent Representatives of the members of the Security Council

I have the honour to enclose herewith a copy of the briefings provided by Mr. Mark Lowcock, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator; and Ms. Susannah Sirkin, Director of Policy and Senior Adviser at Physicians for Human Rights, as well as the statements delivered by the representatives of China, the Dominican Republic, Estonia, France, Germany (on behalf of Belgium and Germany), Indonesia, the Niger, the Russian Federation, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, South Africa, Tunisia, the United States of America and Viet Nam, in connection with the video-teleconference on the situation in the Middle East (Syria) convened on Monday, 29 June 2020. Statements were also delivered by the representatives of the Syrian Arab Republic and Turkey.

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

(Signed) Christoph Heusgen
President of the Security Council



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

As of this morning, Syrian Government authorities have confirmed 256 cases of coronavirus disease (COVID-19) in Syria, including nine fatalities. Six cases have been recorded in the north-east, including one fatality. That is a more than four-fold increase in recorded cases since my last briefing (see S/2020/427). So far, overall infection numbers have, thankfully, remained low. That must be read cautiously, however, since testing remains extremely limited. Little over 8,000 tests have been conducted to date. Moreover, we can see the scale of the risks ahead from what has been happening recently elsewhere in the region, including in Iran, Saudi Arabia and, in particular, Yemen.

The United Nations continues to support COVID-19 preparedness and response measures across Syria, including the expansion of testing capacities. But significant gaps remain, including in personal protective equipment, medical case management supplies and isolation and quarantine capacity.

Syria's health system is not prepared for a large-scale outbreak. We need only to look at Yemen to see how quickly COVID-19 can collapse a health system devastated by years of war. Even as the number of recorded infections remains low, the threat of a broader COVID-19 outbreak is aggravating the economic downturn and constraining the humanitarian response. That could have serious consequences across the whole region, not just in Syria.

It is against that backdrop that I will brief the Council today on three areas: first, the human cost of the economic downturn; secondly, the situation in north-west Syria; and, thirdly, the humanitarian response under way from within Syria, including assistance delivered cross-line.

The prices of food, medicines, fuel and other essential commodities are soaring across the country. The volatile exchange rate has seen the Syrian pound lose more value in the last six months than in the first nine years of the crisis.

This month, the Central Bank adjusted the official exchange rate from 704 pounds to 1,256 pounds against the United States dollar — a 78 per cent devaluation. The unofficial rate fell to its lowest point on record, at 3,120 pounds against the dollar.

Food prices have reached unprecedented levels. Market monitoring by the World Food Programme shows a 200 per cent increase in the price of the national average food basket since last year. A growing number of Syrians are no longer able to provide for themselves and their families. Many report going into debt and eating less to survive. As I briefed the Council in May, the World Food Programme now estimates 9.3 million people to be food insecure. This is the highest level ever recorded in Syria, and it is increasing.

An estimated 4.6 million children and pregnant and breastfeeding mothers are in need of nutrition assistance — 3.7 million in acute need. We estimate that almost half a million children under five suffer from stunting — a condition likely to irreversibly impact their physical and cognitive development. Across the country, people who have struggled through nine years of devastating conflict are telling us that they have now reached their breaking point.

I note again the public assurances by the United States and by the European Union that their sanctions programmes relating to Syria neither ban the flow of humanitarian supplies nor target medicines and medical devices. I welcome their commitment to fully and expeditiously apply humanitarian exemptions. I reiterate

the Secretary-General's appeal for the waiving of sanctions that can undermine countries' capacity to respond to the pandemic.

I am particularly concerned about the situation in the north-west, where an estimated 2.8 million people — 70 per cent of the region's population — require humanitarian assistance. The mass-displacement of almost 1 million people earlier this year and new economic hardships, aggravated by the regional impact of COVID-19, have left civilians in the north-west among the country's most vulnerable.

Displaced families make up two thirds of the current population of the north-west. The vast majority of displaced people sheltering in last-resort sites are concentrated here. Last-resort sites are what we call camps and informal settlements that fall short of even the minimum emergency standards for shelter, water and sanitation. Just last week, rainstorms and flooding in rural Idlib uprooted hundreds of tents and swept away many people's few remaining belongings. In that environment, malnutrition rates have unsurprisingly been rising over the past months. Almost three of every 10 children in the north-west under the age of five suffer from stunting.

Under the cross-border operations, authorized by the Council under resolution 2504 (2020), 1,781 aid trucks crossed the border from Turkey into north-west Syria in May. The majority of that cross-border aid is food — enough for 1.3 million people every month. Still, more and more children and infants are arriving at nutrition centres showing signs of chronic and acute malnutrition. Mothers arriving at the centres say they have long been priced out of food staples and medicines, leaving them solely reliant on the food packages delivered across the border. Some also say they are cooking weeds to supplement the food rations. Such is the level of desperation.

I want to be clear on this point — current levels of assistance delivered across the border are far from sufficient. The north-west continues to face a major humanitarian crisis. The cross-border operation needs to be scaled up further. A failure to extend cross-border authorization would sever the United Nations operation currently under way. It would end United Nations food deliveries and the support to nutrition centres. It would cause suffering and death.

As the Secretary-General states in his latest report (S/2020/576), efforts will continue to be made to deliver cross-line assistance into the north-west. However, currently, it is simply impossible to replicate what is being delivered through the cross-border operation with cross-line assistance.

Planning has progressed for a cross-line mission to Idlib, which has been on hold since April, when United Nations movements into the north-west were paused due to concerns over COVID-19 transmission. Our operational planning has now resumed and is proceeding with careful consideration of those risks, as well as the complex security environment. A concept of operations is being finalized to share with the parties.

The Secretary-General's report further states that continued cross-border operations require an additional 12-month renewal of authorization for the Bab Al-Salam and Bab Al-Hawa border crossings. Both border crossings are required to sustain delivery. While the trans-shipment capacity of Bab Al-Salam is lower than that of Bab Al-Hawa, Bab Al-Salam provides direct access to parts of northern Aleppo that host some of the highest concentrations of displaced people in the country. Some 1.3 million people live in the area accessed from Bab Al-Salam, of whom 62 per cent are internally displaced persons.

I now turn to the massive aid operation continuing from inside Syria. In the first four months of 2020, humanitarian operations inside Syria reached more than

5.5 million people with humanitarian assistance, including cross-line assistance into the north-east. That includes food assistance for 3.2 million people, nutrition support for half a million children, critical water and sanitation for 1.3 million people, 4 million medical procedures and 2.5 million treatment courses.

Due to the deteriorating economic situation, we have expanded humanitarian cash assistance. So far this year, more than \$40 million dollars in cash and vouchers have been distributed to highly vulnerable persons, including people living with disabilities, single-parent households and the elderly.

UNICEF and educational partners are also supporting students currently taking their national exams across the country by preparing safe examination centres and implementing COVID-19 preventative measures. Thousands of students have been travelling cross-line to Government areas, joining a quarter of a million of their peers to sit for their national exams. I wish all the students currently doing that across Syria the very best in their exams.

The World Health Organization (WHO) has dispatched two shipments of medical supplies to the north-east over land, in addition to continued deliveries by air. However, more than five months on from the removal of Al-Yarubiyah, distributions of WHO medical items have not reached the majority of facilities that previously depended on cross-border supplies.

As the Secretary-General stated in his review of cross-line and cross-border assistance back in February (S/2020/139), and as he reiterates in his sixty-seventh report on the humanitarian situation in Syria, a combination of more cross-border and cross-line access is required to sustain current levels of humanitarian assistance into the north-east, and preferably an increase to that assistance. Should adequate steps not be taken for cross-line deliveries to work effectively — and in the absence of consent from the Government of Syria or neighbouring countries to use border crossings into the north-east that are safe and logistically feasible — the Security Council would need to authorize the United Nations and its implementing partners to use additional crossings.

Some 90,000 people remain in overcrowded displacement camps in the north-east, including Al-Hol camp. About 58,000 of them are children from more than 60 different countries. High Commissioner Bachelet last week expressed her concern that thousands are unable to return to their countries of nationality or origin. I join her in calling on States to assume responsibility for their nationals, in accordance with their obligations under international law.

Our humanitarian operations in Syria rely heavily on our front-line partners, including national non-governmental organizations and the Syrian Arab Red Crescent. I call on all parties to facilitate humanitarian access and protect all civilians and civilian objects, including humanitarian workers and assets, in line with their obligations under international humanitarian law.

The humanitarian assistance we provide across Syria also depends on the support of the international community, including the assistance provided by neighbours in the region hosting millions of refugees. Tomorrow is the fourth Brussels Conference on Supporting the Future of Syria and the Region, and we will be asking for that critical support to continue.

On 23 June, the Russian Federation informed the United Nations that it will no longer participate in the humanitarian notification system, which the United Nations and its humanitarian partners use to share information with the parties to the conflict. We will discuss the situation further with our humanitarian partners in Syria and with the Russian Federation. Humanitarian notification aims to facilitate

the safe delivery of humanitarian assistance by informing the parties to the conflict of facilities and movements that fulfil a humanitarian function. Whether or not they participate in the humanitarian notification system, the parties to the conflict remain bound by international humanitarian law, including the principles of distinction, proportionality and precaution.

Security Council resolution 2504 (2020) expires in 11 days. I will conclude by reiterating the Secretary-General's appeal, and my own numerous appeals, to extend the cross-border authorization. That authorization provides a lifeline for millions of civilians in north-west Syria. We cannot reach them without it.

Annex II

Statement by the Director of Policy and Senior Adviser at Physicians for Human Rights, Susannah Sirkin

I thank you, Sir, for the opportunity to provide this briefing to the Council on the humanitarian crisis in Syria.

It is a historic moment for the Council's work, as it faces a global pandemic and hears the growing calls for a future of international peace and security built on respect for human rights, equality and justice for all. It is that spirit that created the United Nations, and this organ, after the Second World War. The biggest pandemic since the Organization's founding presents an urgent call to conscience for the Security Council.

My name is Susannah Sirkin and I am Director of Policy at Physicians for Human Rights — an international non-governmental organization that brings the expertise of science and medicine to the defence of human rights. We have been rigorously documenting and reporting on violations of international humanitarian law in Syria for the past nine years.

It has been just under one year since I last briefed the Council about attacks on health workers and facilities in Syria and the devastating impacts of those crimes on the health and lives of people there (see S/PV.8589). Today's humanitarian crisis in Syria is inextricably linked to the Syrian Government's behaviour over the course of the conflict. While all parties to the conflict have committed violations, the Government's deliberate destruction of health facilities, its criminalization of health care, its targeting of health professionals and its forced displacement of millions of women, men and children have no parallel.

No health system in the world has suffered more violent and systematic targeting than Syria's. And when you kill a doctor, you attack her patients. When you bomb a health clinic, you terrorize a community. In our analysis, that has been part of the strategy of the Syrian Government — to break the spirit of Syrians who oppose the brutal regime by crushing their health care.

Since the beginning of the conflict, in 2011, the Syrian Government and its allies, including the Russian Federation in the later years, have done just that, again and again. Physicians for Human Rights has verified 595 individual attacks on more than 350 facilities over the span of those nine terrible years. Taken together, those attacks constitute crimes against humanity. It is a bleak, distressing tally that challenges the duties of the Council. With widespread impunity, we fear that number will continue to rise given the fragility of the current ceasefire and the recent spike in hostilities in northern Hama and southern Idlib.

Much has changed in our world in the past year. But the core behaviour of the parties to the conflict has not. The Governments of Syria and Russia, both represented at today's Council meeting, have cynically continued to flout international laws and norms for military advantage.

Impunity has thrived where diplomacy has failed. Meaningful accountability for the long list of crimes committed has been practically non-existent. It will continue to be a blight on the Security Council's standing that it repeatedly failed to refer the crimes of the Syrian conflict to the International Criminal Court, the essential institution of last resort when accountability for the gravest crimes known to humankind is glaringly absent. But while the road to justice may be long, we know that more avenues to criminal accountability will arise. As we speak, documentation of grave violations is being used in national courts with universal jurisdiction to build more legal cases and give hope to survivors.

During the past four months, we have seen our world upended by the coronavirus disease (COVID-19). The pandemic has put even the most well-equipped health systems to the test and exacted an unprecedented toll, sparing no country. But after years of conflict, the Syrian population is more exposed than most to the impacts of COVID-19. In north-west and north-east Syria, where meeting the most basic health needs is a daunting task, the spread of COVID-19 would be catastrophic. While reported cases remain low, it is only a matter of time before the coronavirus finds its way into the internally displaced persons camps and dense population centres of these regions.

Despite record-level cross-border aid deliveries into north-west Syria, the humanitarian needs remain overwhelming, and the health system is nowhere near strong enough nor sufficiently supported to effectively respond to a serious outbreak of COVID-19. Overcrowding, malnutrition and persistent gaps in water, sanitation, qualified medical personnel and essential medical resources — from oxygen to personal protective equipment — all make it very likely that the virus will spread like wildfire through the north-west of the country. According to MedGlobal, and as a result of displacement and attacks on health care in north-west Syria, there is an average of only 0.14 doctors per 1,000 people, as compared to 1.3 per 1,000 in the rest of the country.

The situation in the north-east is also critical. The shortages in medical equipment and supplies in an area hosting 2 million people are truly shocking. The gaps have grown more severe since the Council removed the Al-Yarubiyah crossing point, which funnelled critical health aid from Iraq into the north-east. According to non-governmental organizations in the north-east, 11 health facilities are at imminent risk of closure or severe disruption to their services, while another 86 facilities are facing shortages of essential health kits that were usually supplied by the United Nations via the Al-Yarubiyah crossing.

Cross-line aid has clearly not compensated for the loss of the channel, despite recent improvements. For the Council to expect a Government responsible for igniting and perpetuating one of the worst humanitarian crises of our time to turn around and facilitate access to aid in good faith is an exercise in self-delusion.

Our partners in Syria have warned us about the lack of resources they face and the impossibility of effectively enacting mitigation measures in overflowing border camps and overpopulated towns. They have warned us — as they have warned the Security Council — of the impending collapse of their frail health-care system and of the hundreds of thousands of lives hanging in the balance. These doctors, nurses and paramedics have sacrificed years of their lives under the threat of bombs and bullets, enduring unconscionable persecution and unfathomable loss, in order to save as many lives as they can. As one Syrian doctor told us,

“We have died 1,000 times over — from chemical attacks and barrel bombs and rockets and hunger and torture and freezing weather.”

Now, nine years into a brutally executed conflict, physically and psychologically exhausted and lacking the most basic of resources to protect themselves and tend to their patients, they are faced with one of their biggest challenges yet. “All we can do is pray for our patients”, a doctor from a town in western Aleppo recently told us. The Council knows it can and should do more — more to support these health workers, more to put critical resources into their hands and a lot more to prepare them to confront one of the biggest threats to public health the world has seen in a 100 years.

In this context, we call on the Security Council to enable humanitarian assistance through all available channels and to renew the cross-border aid resolution

to secure access to life-saving aid for the 4 million Syrians in need. We and our many fellow non-governmental organizations are calling on the Council to renew the mechanism for a minimum of 12 months, and to re-authorize the Al-Yarubiyah crossing point that was removed by the Council in January.

The need for effective and principled humanitarian aid cannot be overstated. But more than anything else, Syrian civilians and health workers need a sustained reprieve from violence. The Security Council must not spare any effort to sustain and expand the existing ceasefire.

At this historic juncture, when we are all assessing our own countries' vulnerabilities and glaring inequities, it is critical for the Security Council to place humanity before political wrangling and posturing. The Council must not bargain with the lives and the health of Syrians. We and our colleagues working to protect health across the globe implore Council members to do what is right, namely, to support a nation-wide ceasefire, which is so urgent during the COVID-19 pandemic; to unite in their resolve to ensure that aid reaches civilians in need, wherever they may be; and to come together with a view to achieving a sustainable peace through meaningful accountability in Syria. Anything less will only further stain the record of the Security Council.

Annex III

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

I thank Under-Secretary-General Lowcock for his briefing and welcome the Syrian and Turkish Ambassadors to today's meeting. I also listened carefully to Ms. Sirkin's remarks.

China wishes to express its growing concern over the economic and humanitarian situation in Syria. We are deeply worried about the suffering of civilians across the country. In his latest report (S/2020/576), the Secretary-General also shares his deep concern over the accelerating economic decline and its impact on the prices of essential items for the Syrian people.

Since June last year, there has been a 200 per cent increase in food prices. The Syrian pound reached its lowest point on record against the United States dollar. The World Food Programme has estimated that 9.3 million people are food insecure in Syria. The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic brings a further challenge. The big picture of the Syrian humanitarian situation is gloomy.

The prominent factor causing the economic and humanitarian crisis in Syria is unilateral sanctions. The Secretary-General has made a distinct appeal for the waiving of sanctions that undermine countries' capacity to respond to the pandemic. The Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria and the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights echoed this global appeal.

Countries of the region have also voiced their concern over sanctions on Syria, holding that such sanctions have already affected the region's economy. We once again strongly urge relevant countries to lift these sanctions.

Rich and convincing research and analysis has been done, including by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), on how sanctions trigger humanitarian consequences. For example, sanctions and economic blockades lead to increased unemployment and further result in reduced household income for workers and reduced nutritional intake for their dependents. We call on OCHA to give greater attention to the negative impact of sanctions on the humanitarian situation in Syria and other countries and update the Security Council with a comprehensive review on this topic.

As we have repeatedly stated, the Syrian Government bears the primary responsibility for improving the humanitarian situation in Syria, including preventing and containing the spread of COVID-19. It cannot shirk its role. We are glad to learn about the progress in cross-line humanitarian operations. In May, the World Health Organization dispatched an overland delivery of medical supplies from Latakia to the north-east, apart from deliveries that continued by air. United Nations agencies and relevant parties should put more focus on removing the obstacles to cross-line operations and work with the Syrian Government to use the crossing points under its control and with its consent.

With regard to cross-border humanitarian assistance, we take note that such operations are still needed in Syria, even if relevant parties have different positions on the cross-border mechanism. We believe that any decision of the Security Council must show respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Syria. We are willing to maintain communication with fellow Council members on this issue.

I would like to take this opportunity to express appreciation to the humanitarian workers who are delivering services to the people in need, in accordance with

the guiding principles of humanitarian emergency assistance set forth in General Assembly resolution 46/182.

With regard to the security situation, China supports the ceasefire appeals made by the Secretary-General and his Special Envoy and calls on all parties to use this opportunity to enhance political dialogue and mutual trust. Meanwhile, we should remain alert to the fact that armed groups and terrorists are seeking to take advantage of this period to escalate attacks, as mentioned in the report of the Secretary-General. Effective, cooperative and targeted counter-terrorism efforts must be put in place.

Finally, but not with any less importance, let me reiterate China's firm position on supporting the Syrian-led, Syrian-owned political process, which we do while fully respecting the sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity of Syria.

Annex IV

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

We thank Under-Secretary-General Mark Lowcock for his briefing and welcome Ms. Susannah Sirkin once again to the Security Council.

I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the many humanitarian workers who are addressing the needs of the people of Syria and express our admiration for their work. It is clear for the Dominican Republic that, at this juncture, the most important role the Security Council can play is to facilitate the work of those real heroes, so that they can do their jobs in saving the lives of those who have endured the consequences of this conflict, who have been subject to neglect, hunger, displacement, fear and now, once again, profound uncertainty.

The Dominican Republic will not now repeat what we all already know about the humanitarian situation of millions of Syrians. But let us nevertheless take a moment to think about what we can do about the situation, having no other concern in mind than the needs of the people — no political considerations, no transactional approaches, no bargaining — just the needs of the people. Is that so hard to do? If we were to take only that approach it would be easy to protect the services that Syrians are receiving through the cross-border mechanism.

Let us take one example: food insecurity. The World Food Programme has indicated that there are currently 9.3 million food-insecure people across Syria. Within the framework of the cross-border mechanism, in 2020 alone, the United Nations has reached 56,974 households in the north-west of the country, providing support so as to improve food security and livelihoods and to protect and build productive farming and livestock assets, including those of internally displaced persons. Ensuring the continuity of food production and sufficient local availability and affordability of agricultural produce and animal-source foods is also an important contribution towards preventing malnutrition in the urban and rural human populations in north-west Syria, particularly in women and children. This crucial support includes capacity-building for farmers and local partners and provision of animal-health services.

The cross-border mechanism in Syria is therefore not only about warehouses, boxes, trucks and delivery of assistance. It supports the lives and futures of hundreds of thousands of people in rural areas. It allows women and children to have access to health, education and protection services that otherwise would not be available to them. Indeed, Ms. Sirkin just talked about the devastating impact of the conflict on health care. In short, the cross-border mechanism allows people to cope with the devastating impacts of conflict and our collective inability to solve the conflict through peaceful means.

There is no alternative to the cross-border mechanism — not now, and at least for the Dominican Republic, not until we can see assurances that cross-line access into both the north-west and the north-east is timely and sustained. We need assurances that cross-line access leads to independent and impartial needs assessments followed by principled humanitarian assistance. Only then will we be able, as stated before, to shift to an all-modalities mutually complementary approach, which is, of course, the best-case scenario given the dire and massive needs present in Syria. A single modality is simply not enough.

We reiterate our position that, given the potential impact of the coronavirus in the north-east, a temporary reauthorization of the Al-Yarubiyah crossing is needed. We are also determined to continue to work towards the renewal for 12 months of

the cross-border assistance mechanism for the north-west in order to support the programming and procurement procedures that precede such a massive operation. This objective is based on the increasing needs of the population, including those who continue to be displaced. In this context, we would also mention the fragility of the security situation.

Let us join our efforts and take people-centred decisions. It is in our hands. Let us do the right thing.

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

I express my gratitude to all humanitarian workers on the front lines in Syria. I also thank both Under-Secretary-General Lowcock and Ms. Sirkin for their briefings.

It is promising to hear that the number of coronavirus disease (COVID-19) cases in Syria has not exploded. Nevertheless, as we know and heard again today, owing to the lack of testing, the numbers are not telling us the whole story, and the situation could still change rapidly in a matter of days. Most vulnerable to the virus are those people in overcrowded internally displaced person camps across the country. Unimpeded access to these areas is crucial for an effective response to the COVID-19 outbreak and humanitarian needs.

Despite the initial containment of the virus, other problems remain. The possible withdrawal of the Russian Federation from the United Nations deconfliction arrangement is a worrisome sign, as it increases the risk of escalation. Disengagement from a peaceful solution also reaffirms the findings of the Secretary-General's board of inquiry, which clearly established that the Syrian regime and its allies have deliberately attacked humanitarian locations around Idlib and elsewhere. We condemn those attacks and call on Russia to resume its coordination with the United Nations and other parties on the ground under the deconfliction mechanism. Better to have 10 years of negotiations than one day of war.

Considering the challenges, Estonia supports all the efforts of humanitarian penholders Belgium and Germany to renew the cross-border mandate. It is clear that both cross-line and cross-border modalities are required to reach all Syrians. Council members also cannot overlook the acute need for aid in north-eastern Syria. Compared to last year, only one-third of facilities receive the necessary equipment and medicine. We need a durable solution. Reauthorizing the Al-Yarubiyah border crossing for cross-border deliveries is the most effective answer, but other alternatives could be considered. We cannot ignore the suffering of the people in that large area.

Finally, as long as the Syrian Government avoids taking responsibility and refuses to genuinely engage in the political process, the European Union's economic sanctions will remain in place. Those measures are there to bring justice and force the regime to choose peace over destroying its own country, as was so vividly described by Ms. Sirkin just now. This is also an imperative for the fourth Brussels conference on supporting the future of Syria, which started today. We want to note that the European Union and the United States together contribute about 90 per cent of United Nations funding for Syrians.

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

[Original: English and French]

First of all, many thanks to Mr. Lowcock and Ms. Sirkin for their presentations.

As they reminded us, with the coronavirus disease pandemic and the economic crisis resulting from corruption and disastrous management, humanitarian needs have been steadily increasing in a country where more than 11 million people depend on humanitarian aid. Only a nationwide, immediate and sustainable ceasefire, under the auspices of the United Nations, will make it possible to protect the civilian population. It is essential as the truce between Russia and Turkey in the north-west remains fragile.

We will never say it often enough — respect for international humanitarian law is an obligation for all parties. I am referring in particular to the protection of civilians, including humanitarian and medical personnel and their infrastructure. In that regard, we deeply regret Russia's decision to withdraw from the deconfliction mechanism.

All parties, in particular the Syrian regime, must ensure humanitarian access. The cross-border humanitarian mechanism has never been so indispensable, both in the north-west and in the north-east. Cross-line aid is vastly insufficient to respond to the needs and, in any case, does not provide all necessary guarantees of transparency and impartiality. A renewal for 12 months of the cross-border mechanism, as requested by the Secretary-General, is essential. France fully supports the draft resolution prepared by Germany and Belgium, including the reopening for an initial period of six months of the Al-Yarubiyah border crossing, which fully responds to those humanitarian imperatives.

I call on Council members to show unity and responsibility. The instrumentalization of humanitarian aid must stop. The Syrian population must not become hostage to it. The European Union (EU) and its member States are the main contributors of humanitarian aid, regardless of the beneficiaries, having allocated more than 18 billion euros to the Syrian people since 2011. The fourth Brussels conference will confirm that yet again. In addition, France will continue to strongly support all efforts aimed at preventing violations of international humanitarian and human rights law and punishing their perpetrators.

Lastly, only a political solution in line with resolution 2254 (2015) will end the humanitarian tragedy and bring long-term stability to the country. Today, our collective priority must be to address the emergencies and respond to the huge humanitarian needs in Syria before considering any development activity. We contribute to that everywhere in Syria. Until a credible political process is firmly under way, France and the EU will not finance reconstruction in Syria. The Council members know our position on the lifting of sanctions and normalization, which remains unchanged.

Annex VII

Statement by the Permanent Mission of Germany to the United Nations

I am delivering this statement on behalf of the co-penholders, Belgium and Germany. We would like to thank Under-Secretary-General Lowcock for his briefing. We also thank Susannah Sirkin for being with us today to shed light on the situation of health facilities and health workers in Syria. Our thanks for her powerful statement.

The destruction of health facilities and the shortage of health workers is an overwhelming humanitarian challenge in normal times; in times of pandemic, it is highly likely to cause further disaster.

We thank Physicians for Human Rights for continuing to demand accountability and for continuing to hold warring parties to account. We should all work together to limit the impact of war on civilians and try to refine existing protection mechanisms, such as the humanitarian notification system. It is important to underline that parties who withdraw from that mechanism remain bound by international humanitarian law.

As we just heard from Mr. Lowcock, the humanitarian crisis in Syria continues on an appalling scale. The demand for humanitarian assistance is not decreasing. On the contrary, nine years of war, the irresponsibility of the Syrian authorities, coronavirus disease and its economic impact and the crisis in Lebanon are causing more and more Syrians to sink into poverty. The World Food Programme recently stated that an additional 1.4 million Syrians have become food insecure since the beginning of 2020.

Today and tomorrow, international partners will meet for the fourth Brussels conference, and new pledges will be made to support the future of Syria and the region. Tomorrow, donors will demonstrate that the world cares, that the people of Syria are not forgotten. The humanitarian co-penholders, Germany and Belgium, are important donors and we will continue our efforts to alleviate the suffering of the Syrian people.

But it is not only about funding. It is also — perhaps mostly — about access. Humanitarian assistance is of little use if the people most in need cannot easily be reached. Colleagues, that is why the humanitarian co-penholders are asking for your cooperation in good faith. Security Council members must work together for a renewal of resolution 2504 (2020). The lives of millions of Syrians depend on cross-border assistance from Turkey and Iraq.

Six weeks ago, during the last meeting on Syria humanitarian in this virtual Chamber, Mr. Lowcock asked Security Council members for an early decision, stating that “this decision cannot be left to the last minute. Too many lives are at stake” (*S/2020/427, p. 3*).

The co-penholders started the process early, in an inclusive and transparent manner. Moreover, comparing the latest bimonthly report of the Secretary-General (*S/2020/576*), published some days ago, with the previous ones, we see exactly the same recommendations. Regarding the north-west, the recommendation is for a renewal of resolution 2504 (2020) for 12 months because a failure to renew would sever that lifeline for millions of civilians and because it is simply impossible to replicate with cross-line assistance. As for the north-east, a combination of more cross-border and cross-line is required to sustain levels of humanitarian assistance.

We all know that, as Mr. Lowcock explained very well, a humanitarian operation like the one taking place through the border crossings of Bab Al-Salam

and Bab Al-Hawa, in north-western Syria, requires weeks and often months of lead time. Operations are at an all-time record level. By delaying the process, we put in danger the ability of humanitarian organizations to save lives.

At the beginning of these negotiations, we promised each other to do better this time. Yes, the cross-border mechanism is meant to be temporary. Yes, cross-line aid is important and growing. But the reality on the ground is that cross-line aid is nowhere near the required level to meet the vast humanitarian needs. This means that the cross-border mechanism remains as relevant and necessary as ever and will be so for the foreseeable future. We must not allow ourselves to be misguided by political or military considerations. Let us concentrate instead on the essential: life-saving humanitarian assistance.

I would like to add a few words in my national capacity. I have already mentioned the importance of the Brussels conference taking place tomorrow. German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas will attend the conference and announce the German pledge. Our support for the Syrian people has been unwavering. Germany pledged more than \$1.6 billion in 2019. The needs of the Syrian population are even higher in 2020. We will take that into account and call on others to do the same.

German assistance has amounted to more than \$10 billion since 2012. More than 700,000 thousand Syrian refugees live in Germany. We truly care about the people of Syria. The German approach is a purely humanitarian one. Therefore, we are deeply committed to the renewal of the resolution on the cross-border mechanism. In addition, we must not forget to support the neighbouring countries. It is high time to stop those waging war in Syria.

Annex VIII

Statement by the Permanent Mission of Indonesia to the United Nations

We thank Under-Secretary-General Mark Lowcock and Ms. Susannah Sirkin for their briefings.

As the economic situation in Syria continues to deteriorate and the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic further increases the risk to the livelihoods of millions of Syrians, my delegation believes that an all-out effort to fulfil the humanitarian needs of people in Syria is, now more than ever, highly critical.

As mentioned by Mr. Lowcock, the World Food Programme has estimated that around 9.3 million people in Syria are food insecure and 11.1 million are in need of humanitarian assistance, of whom 4.7 million are in acute need. These numbers are deeply disturbing. They represent men, women and children, the elderly and disabled persons who are struggling to meet their basic needs. Accordingly, efforts to save lives in Syria must continue.

My delegation wishes to focus on the following points.

First, we share the Secretary-General's view that a sustained and large-scale cross-border response will continue to be necessary in order to meet the enormous humanitarian needs in the north-west. We note that the use of the Bab Al-Salam and Bab Al-Hawa border crossings is a lifeline for millions of civilians and that the United Nations does not have any alternative ways of reaching those people.

The recorded monthly average aid trucks crossing into Syria this year was 1,350, with the highest number crossing last month using this cross-border operation. We note the ability of the operation to scale up its activities as crisis intensifies and as people's needs increase. Therefore, it is, as recommended by the Secretary-General, necessary to renew the cross-border authorization for an additional 12 months in order to guarantee the continuation of life-saving assistance.

We encourage all colleagues to be united and to find a consensus outcome while taking into account what is most important — saving human lives. My delegation encourages the United Nations to continue working with its partners and other relevant parties to ensure the accountability systems and the United Nations monitoring mechanism.

Secondly, the impact of the closure of the Al-Yarubiyah border crossing needs to be mitigated. We note that the aid deliveries to the north-east have not been sufficient to address the needs that were previously met through Al-Yarubiyah. My delegation encourages Council members to discuss this issue wisely, taking into account the millions of people in need across Syria.

Lastly, there is an urgent need to address the groups vulnerable to COVID-19. I wish to underscore the risk and impact of COVID-19, especially on vulnerable groups in Syria. We have taken note of what Mr. Lowcock alluded to, namely, the already fragile health systems and facilities in many parts of the region, including in Syria, and, thus, the need for the international community to bolster them, particularly during this time of COVID-19.

Overcrowding in camps in some areas of Syria, where medical facilities and sanitation are lacking, increases the spread of the pandemic in those sites. We therefore appreciate the continued support of the United Nations in assisting with COVID-19 preparedness and response across Syria and encourage it to redouble its efforts to help vulnerable groups. We urge all parties to the conflict to cooperate and provide

the United Nations and its humanitarian partners with all the necessary access for humanitarian deliveries, particularly to the camps for internally displaced persons.

In this challenging period, the Syrian people not only need increased humanitarian assistance but also yearn for a period of sustained calm across the country. We call on all parties to respect the call by the Secretary-General and the Special Envoy for a nationwide ceasefire. We cannot afford more violence and tensions. We urge all parties to uphold their obligation under international humanitarian law to protect civilians and civilian infrastructure.

Annex IX

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

I would like to begin by thanking the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, Mark Lowcock, and the Director of the non-governmental organization Physicians for Human Rights, Susannah Sirkin, for the quality of their briefings. I also thank the Secretary-General for his report on the humanitarian situation in Syria (S/2020/576).

Unfortunately, that complex situation continues to deteriorate. It is feared that, with a health system already weakened by several years of insecurity, coronavirus disease (COVID-19) will spread rapidly, particularly in camps for internally displaced persons, where social distancing and hygiene standards can hardly be guaranteed.

Nevertheless, we are pleased to note that Syria has so far registered a low number of cases of COVID-19 and continues its efforts to provide the necessary medical supplies and equipment to help limit the spread. In that regard, we commend the efforts of the World Health Organization and all national and international organizations to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in Syria, particularly in conflict affected areas. The Niger also commends the Syrian Government for its continued collaboration with the United Nations and other organizations to enable the delivery of humanitarian assistance within the framework of the cross-border and cross-line mechanism. My delegation calls on the Government and humanitarian organizations to enhance their cooperation and redouble their efforts to protect Syrians in all regions of the country.

However, the Niger remains concerned about reports of an unacceptable humanitarian situation regarding the cases of women and children who are victims of the fighting between armed groups and the fate and well-being of many detainees on both sides. In that regard, we would like to echo the Secretary-General's appeal to the belligerents to share information on the fate of the detainees with their families within a reasonable time frame.

We therefore also reiterate our support for the appeal launched by Special Envoy Pedersen on 18 May for "[l]arge-scale and unilateral releases as well as more meaningful actions on missing persons" (S/2020/420, p. 3).

The deterioration of the Syrian economy as a result of the war and the recent devaluation of the Syrian pound further complicates the already precarious living conditions of the population. The shortage and the soaring prices of certain basic necessities, including food items, in recent weeks are threatening the livelihoods of many Syrian families. According to the World Food Programme, 9.3 million people are now considered food insecure in Syria.

The Niger reiterates the urgent need to take the necessary steps to guarantee access to food, essential medical supplies and medical assistance in the context of COVID-19, and echoes the call made by the Secretary-General last March for the suspension of the economic sanctions imposed on that country.

The Security Council must find a permanent and secure solution to the problem of the delivery of humanitarian aid to north-eastern and north-western Syria. But, in the meantime, the cross-border and cross-line mechanism for the delivery of this aid remains the only lifeline for millions of Syrians in need. In that regard, we look forward to the renewal of resolution 2504 (2020) in July, on a consensual and non-politicized basis.

In conclusion, whether we are talking about humanitarian, political or chemical-weapons issues, respect for Syria's sovereignty and the full involvement of its Government in all the processes are crucial to finding lasting solutions to the crisis. My delegation therefore calls on Council members to put aside their differences and make the necessary compromises so that we can help the Syrians turn this painful page in the history of their country.

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

We thank Mark Lowcock for the briefing. We also listened carefully to the philippic of Ms. Sirkin.

Once again, we are discussing the humanitarian situation in Syria. Once again, we hear from some members of the Council that the cross-border mechanism is the magic solution to the humanitarian problems in Syria — the mechanism that in fact has become a political tool for drawing lines of division inside Syria. Yet they forget to mention not only that it is incompatible with international law and humanitarian principles, but also that it has never functioned in line with resolution 2165 (2014). We have repeatedly pointed that out but it has simply been ignored. What is even more disturbing is that the cross-border mechanism is used as leverage against cross-line deliveries and as a pretext and an excuse not to engage seriously in humanitarian supplies from within Syria. In our view, that borders on sabotage, and this is not just a slogan. We have concrete facts that we can present.

We welcome the United Nations and Syrian Arab Red Crescent joint assessment mission to western Aleppo. We would like to hear more about the situation on the ground and what is left after the terrorists were pushed back from there. What are the plans of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) on how to assist the development of that area? We would also like to hear about the cross-line delivery to Darat Izzah and Al-Atarib in north-western Syria, which was approved by Damascus but was not carried out by the United Nations under the pretext of spreading the coronavirus from Government-controlled areas to Idlib. There are only 255 reported cases in Syria. According to that logic, we should perhaps have stopped humanitarian deliveries to Idlib from the coronavirus-affected territories from where they come?

We heard Mr. Lowcock's assessment of the overall situation in north-eastern Syria, including in the Al-Hol camp. We would also be interested to hear about the situation in the Rukban camp and to learn more about the five commercial trucks that delivered goods to the Rukban local market.

We hoped to hear from Under-Secretary-General Lowcock an assessment of the impact of the United States Administration Caesar Act on the humanitarian situation in Syria and on the lives of ordinary Syrians. It is hard to understand how these measures correlate with the proclaimed aim to ensure the best options for humanitarian assistance. Do not try to convince us that unilateral sanctions and coercive measures enforced by Western countries against Syria do not affect humanitarian efforts. These reassurances are hypocritical. Their waivers and exemptions do not work. On the one hand, they advocate humanitarian assistance, first and foremost through the cross-border mechanism, and, on the other hand, they suffocate ordinary Syrians.

I cannot but regret that the report of the Secretary-General on humanitarian issues (S/2020/401) contains the call to cooperate with the so-called International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to Assist in the Investigation and Prosecution of Persons Responsible for the Most Serious Crimes under International Law Committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011 — an unlawful structure that was established to implicate Syria. Mark Lowcock mentioned that he welcomed the movement of Syrian students in the country to obtain their diplomas. However, he failed to mention that 2,000 of them could not leave Idlib, since terrorists prevented them from doing so.

Turning to the Brussels donor conference, we saw the financial report of the European Commission. The figures look impressive, but they are not very transparent when it comes to the recipients of this assistance. Who exactly are these recipients in Syria? Which Syrians received this assistance? We stress again that holding Brussels conferences on Syria without Syria looks, at best, questionable.

Many Council members spoke about the deconfliction mechanism in Syria. In that regard, we would like to underscore that this mechanism was a voluntary arrangement. It has neither the mandate of the Security Council nor any other legal basis.

We have repeatedly pointed out the drawbacks of the mechanism. This has also consistently been ignored. One of its main shortcomings is that the information provided by OCHA comes from unknown and unidentified sources. They cannot be verified. At the same time, our own inquiries have repeatedly proved that some of the deconflicted sites were in fact used as terrorists' headquarters or hide-outs and therefore could not be granted a humanitarian status. Last September we organized a special media event at United Nations Headquarters, where we clearly demonstrated the shortcomings of this mechanism.

The information provided was used by terrorists and their supporters to deliberately mislead the United Nations and the international community. It has repeatedly triggered false accusations that civilian sites were bombed by Syria or Russia. The functioning of the deconfliction mechanism was one of the pretexts for establishing the Board of Inquiry. The conclusions of the Board itself proved the shortcomings of the mechanism. The Russian Ministry of Defence was compelled to use its resources to investigate the findings of the Board of Inquiry and provide its own conclusions. We will be sharing those with the Council.

It is also difficult to understand why the Government of Syria was not a direct party to the mechanism. Russian representatives in Damascus, Geneva and New York will no longer accept any lists of objects for deconfliction. We suggest that from now on OCHA settles the issue of deconflicted sites with the Syrian Government. This would be the right way to proceed.

Russia respects and will continue to respect its obligations under international humanitarian law. We stressed many times that the Russian Air Force uses an efficient system of target verification that excludes the possibility of civilian sites being targeted. I say this to reassure those who fear that humanitarian deliveries in Syria will now become targets. That is not true. Russia never strikes civilian convoys. Our close coordination with the Syrian Government, which in fact approves all aid deliveries, provides additional guarantees.

I have a rhetorical question. I do not remember any complaints from United Nations agencies about shortcomings of the deconfliction mechanism in Raqqa, Al-Baghuz or Hajin. However, today we hear about the terrible situation in the health-care system in north-eastern Syria. Do we know why? Because Raqqa, for example, was razed to the ground with all its hospitals. How many boards of inquiry were set up then by the United Nations?

We would also like to hear an update from OCHA on the implementation of the Declaration of Commitment on Compliance with International Humanitarian Law and the Facilitation of Humanitarian Assistance, signed by some armed opposition groups under OCHA's auspices. How are these armed groups respecting it and what are these groups? And how does the United Nations monitor the implementation of their commitments?

In conclusion, let me reiterate that we should depoliticize the Syrian humanitarian file, as well as the overall Syrian dossier, and ensure that humanitarian aid is delivered in Syria in accordance with humanitarian principles.

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

I, too, thank Under-Secretary-General Lowcock and Ms. Sirkin for their briefings.

Saint Vincent and the Grenadines remains alarmed by the dire humanitarian situation in Syria, which has been exacerbated by the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. The magnitude and complexity of the crisis continue to demonstrate the urgent need to scale up the humanitarian response — a lifeline for millions of Syrians. In that regard, we reiterate our support for the most optimal access arrangements, through all modalities, to guarantee the rapid, uninterrupted and direct provision of humanitarian aid to all who need it.

Syria's swiftly deteriorating economic situation is also profoundly concerning. Millions are now food insecure and basic necessities have become unattainable luxuries. Syria cannot continue to withstand the pressures of unilateral sanctions, which also serve to undermine the country's COVID-19 response and mitigation efforts. We therefore reiterate our calls for the lifting of all unilateral coercive measures to assist the country in confronting the seemingly insurmountable challenges.

The Secretary-General's most recent report (S/2020/576) notes that the Allouk water station and power supply were disrupted multiple times in April and May. Thousands of people residing in overcrowded camps and informal settlements are heavily dependent on its supply. The numerous interruptions significantly diminish the capacity to manage the pandemic through basic hygiene precautions and deny an essential service to the most vulnerable. We urge all parties to work together to ensure the sustained flow of water to civilians in need.

In northern Syria, Security Council-designated terrorist groups continue to pose a considerable threat, and this necessitates coordinated and targeted counter-terrorism operations. However, we recall that these efforts must fully respect obligations under international law.

Above all, the well-being of the Syrian people is paramount. Hostilities bring harm to civilians, destroy critical infrastructure and obstruct the provision of vital humanitarian aid. We strongly urge the parties to the conflict to continue to exercise maximum restraint and to de-escalate tensions. The ceasefire in the north-west must be preserved and a nationwide cessation of hostilities must be pursued.

Syria's humanitarian situation is inextricably linked to its political process. Without a political solution that has full regard for Syria's sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity, the conflict will continue and the humanitarian situation will worsen. Cooperation must be prioritized in order to achieve the goals of resolution 2254 (2015) and to bring peace and stability back to Syria.

Annex XII

Statement by the Permanent Mission of South Africa to the United Nations

Allow me to thank the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, Mr. Mark Lowcock, for his timely briefing on the humanitarian situation in Syria. We also take note of the briefing by Ms. Susannah Sirkin, Director of Policy and Senior Advisor at Physicians for Human Rights.

Let me begin by reiterating South Africa's call for a cessation of all hostilities across Syria, the safe, unimpeded and impartial delivery of humanitarian aid throughout the country and assistance to all who require it, no matter where they are.

The prolonged conflict has left lasting effects throughout Syria and has left a permanent scar on the people of Syria. Children born in the last decade have known no peace. They have known only war and seen the devastation around them.

As we have seen from the Secretary-General's latest report, the humanitarian situation in Syria remains dire, with women and children bearing the worst of the conflict and deteriorating humanitarian circumstances. South Africa is deeply concerned that the number of people throughout Syria who are now food insecure has reached 9.3 million in the past six months, the highest number ever recorded in Syria.

We call on all parties to put humanity first and seek a peaceful resolution of the conflict. Such a peaceful resolution requires a cessation of hostilities and a recognition of Syrian sovereignty and territorial integrity.

The situation in Syria can be resolved only through negotiation and dialogue, and South Africa therefore calls on all parties to exert every effort towards the full implementation of resolution 2254 (2015) to further avoid the displacement of Syrians and loss of innocent lives.

The spread of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) virus remains a threat in Syria, with a significant increase in positive cases in the past month and the potential for a further increase in the coming months. We appreciate and commend the efforts made by the United Nations and its agencies, the Syrian Government and local authorities for the steps that have been taken to curb the virus.

Preparedness and response planning are essential components of any humanitarian response. This is even more critical in a situation where the health system is fragile and there are large groups of people staying in overcrowded spaces, such as refugees, internally displaced persons, the elderly and people with underlying health conditions, who are particularly vulnerable to COVID-19. The situation is exacerbated by the lack of adequate water and sanitation infrastructure, as well as a shortage of qualified health personnel, medical equipment and supplies.

In that regard, the unilateral sanctions imposed on Syria have had a further deteriorating impact on the economic and humanitarian situation in the country. The impact of the conflict is exacerbated by these measures, which have led to a further deterioration of the economy, thereby affecting the livelihoods and food security of ordinary Syrians throughout the country. The intended impact of these sanctions, which surely is not to resolve the conflict, must be questioned. The measures adopted by the international community and individual Member States should be in order to save lives and improve the humanitarian situation, not lead to further hardship.

South Africa notes that the 5 March ceasefire is holding in north-western Syria. However, we remain concerned about the increased sporadic violence between and within armed groups, and the apparent indiscriminate use of weaponry

between various non-State armed groups, which has resulted in the injury and death of civilians.

Reports indicate that armed groups appear to have taken advantage of the focus on the COVID-19 pandemic to escalate attacks in various areas. We should not allow armed groups to take advantage of the international community's focus on stopping the spread of COVID-19 to escalate attacks.

We also express concern at the reports of the burning of large swathes of agricultural land, further exacerbating the food security situation.

South Africa is also deeply troubled at the continued detention of individuals, including women and children, by parties in areas under their effective control. It is unacceptable that people are detained seemingly without cause. In this regard, South Africa wishes to call on all parties to the conflict to abide by their obligation to respect international human rights law and international humanitarian law concerning persons deprived of their liberty. We continue to call on the parties to release detained civilians, particularly women, children, the elderly and vulnerable groups, which, during these times of COVID-19, include the sick and those with underlying medical conditions.

Additionally, South Africa wishes to reiterate that all measures to counter terrorism should comply with obligations under, and respect for, international humanitarian law and international human rights law.

In closing, the Secretary-General clearly states in his report

“that the provision of humanitarian assistance requires timely, safe, sustained and unimpeded access by the United Nations and all humanitarian partners to people in need across the Syrian Arab Republic” (*S/2020/576, para. 28*).

South Africa fully supports the Secretary-General in his call, and will continue to advocate for the provision of humanitarian assistance to all Syrians in need, through all available and direct means and modalities, including through cross-border and cross-line deliveries. We commend the United Nations, the World Health Organization and other aid organizations working with the Syrian Government for the improvement in the facilitation of cross-line humanitarian assistance, while noting the Secretary-General's report that cross-line assistance has to be bolstered by cross-border assistance.

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

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

I would also like to extend a warm welcome to our colleagues, the Permanent Representatives of Syria and Turkey.

The Syrians have been suffering long years of conflict and economic hardship. The threat of the sweeping coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic risks aggravating their plight even further. At the same time, Syria has reached a tipping point of territorial and economic disintegration, as trends suggest, with potentially far-reaching consequences for the stability of the region. Syria's sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity are crucial, and the Security Council has a major responsibility to preserve them.

We believe that there is no viable alternative to the search for a settlement in line with resolution 2254 (2015), in order to put an end to the human suffering and recover Syria's full sovereignty over its entire territory. Until a political solution is reached, principled humanitarian delivery of aid must continue to be scaled up throughout Syria to meet growing needs and cope with multiplied risks and vulnerabilities as a result of COVID-19.

As the Council prepares to renew the cross-border mechanism, it is important that humanitarian considerations prevail and that we speak to consensus and compromise. Tunisia will be joining consensus on any proposal aimed at ensuring sufficient delivery of impartial and depoliticized humanitarian aid to those in need and enabling the renewal of the cross-border mandate.

There should be no selective approach to humanitarian access in Syria. Rather, a combination of cross-border and cross-line modalities remains pertinent, with neither modality being exclusive or sufficient alone. We stress the importance of this dual approach being incremental and adequately calibrated in a way that respects and ultimately safeguards Syria's sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity and responds to the needs of the Syrian people.

In north-western Syria, we welcome the announcement by Under-Secretary-General Lowcock earlier today on the progress made in the operational planning of the cross-line mission in Idlib, in line with the Secretary-General's recommendation on using combined access modalities for the delivery of humanitarian relief. We also express our support for the renewal of the mandate of the two cross-border operations in the north-west for 12 months.

In the north-east, Tunisia believes that there is a need for hybrid, creative and consensual solutions that enable full, sustained and unimpeded delivery of humanitarian aid, including of medical aid.

Viable and unhindered access is also needed for the United Nations in south-eastern Syria to prevent further deterioration of the humanitarian conditions of the remaining population in Rukban. All parties should work together to that end.

The war has left millions of Syrians displaced and in urgent need of humanitarian assistance. It has also devastated medical infrastructure and the Syrian economy.

As we commend the leading role of the United Nations in coordinating humanitarian relief to help alleviate the appalling humanitarian situation in Syria,

we reiterate the necessity for the political track to be accelerated to achieve a solution that brings a peaceful end to the crisis in Syria.

In the meantime, we believe it is essential that reconstruction of destroyed or damaged hospitals, which are at the core of the humanitarian response, including the COVID-19 response, as well as of schools, be made possible on purely humanitarian grounds.

Only consensus will save lives.

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

I too thank Susannah Sirkin for challenging the duties of the Security Council — the moral duties of the Council. I also thank Mark Lowcock for his briefing today. I could hear the urgency in his voice, and he knows the time is now and the urgency of the moment, so I thank him for once again being with us today and being on that emotional rollercoaster. I can give him our word that, as Christoph said, we promise to do better the next time — we will do better this time.

In only 11 days, the Council's mandate for the life-saving cross-border humanitarian aid mechanism will expire. Eleven days. I cannot overstate how important the Council's decision will be to millions of people throughout Syria. And the decision before the Council is simple. Will we do the right thing and save lives or will we allow people die?

The answer is clear to the United States, as it should be for every member of this Council. We must authorize the United Nations continued use of both Bab Al-Hawa and Bab Al-Salam for 12 months, the mandate of resolution 2504 (2020) for 12 months, and temporarily reopen the Al-Yarubiyah crossing into the north-east to prevent the spread of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19).

Our position is based on fundamental humanitarian imperative and basic human decency. It is based on our obligation to feed the hungry, tend to the sick, do all we can for those who are suffering and in need and meet basic needs. This is a responsibility each of us shares as we consider the renewal of resolution 2504 (2020). We — and I mean we, as in each one of us — must make the right choice. We must take action to save lives because Al-Assad, his regime and his allies have failed to meet their basic responsibilities while waging war against the Syrian people. They have turned humanitarian aid into a weapon of this war for almost a decade.

As we speak, the regime's despicable starve-and-siege tactics are heavily restricting the United Nations internal cross-line assistance efforts to places like north-eastern Syria, Rukban and rural Damascus. These communities rely on cross-line aid approved by Damascus, but they receive it only when it is politically expedient for Damascus to provide the approvals. This is why only a handful of the cross-line convoys have reached north-eastern Syria since January, and why the people inside the Rukban camp for internally displaced persons have had to go for months without United Nations shipments of food and other supplies — basic needs.

Because the Al-Assad regime will not permit the United Nations to replace cross-border provision of medicines and medical supplies via the cross-line mechanism, Al-Yarubiyah remains the most viable and effective option for the United Nations delivery of such needed supplies and services. Once again, these needed supplies and services are basic — they are basic needs. Its closure undermines the United Nations response and the response of all actors that rely on United Nations-imported supplies. Further, the crossing is critical to ensuring the provision of adequate support to the people and the communities recovering from the scourge of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham (ISIS) in eastern Syria and in helping prevent ISIS from re-emerging in Iraq and Syria.

We cannot mistake the one-off deliveries and one-off approvals from Damascus as real progress towards improving and sustained humanitarian access. The United Nations continues to tell us that cross-line deliveries are insufficient and that large gaps remain between what is needed by millions of Syrians and what Damascus approves. We should trust and we should act on the United Nations assessment.

That is why the United States is fighting to implement the Secretary-General's recommendation to address the needs in north-eastern Syria through a combination of cross-line and cross-border aid. Restoring cross-border access through the Al-Yarubiyah crossing is essential as we all work with the United Nations to make cross-line deliveries more regular and impartial, not based on the whims of the murderous regime in Damascus.

Troublingly, we understand that Russia has terminated its deconfliction arrangement with the United Nations, putting the lives of millions in north-western Syria at risk and further obstructing the delivery of United Nations assistance in this area. Russia's decision is completely unacceptable and is designed to erect new barriers to the provision of humanitarian assistance, placing in serious jeopardy the safety and security of humanitarians on the ground. We are shocked that Russia would take such a dangerous step.

I want to address head on the accusations that United States sanctions under the Caesar Act are undermining humanitarian access in Syria. Suggestions that our sanctions prevent humanitarian aid from reaching Syria are propaganda meant to distract from the horrors of the Al-Assad regime and its irresponsible economic mismanagement. The Caesar Act and Syria sanctions do not target medicine or food. They focus on significant transactions that support the Government of Syria or certain persons acting on behalf of the regime. They target the Al-Assad regime, not the Syrian people.

Further, the Caesar Act provides for certain waivers, including a national security interest waiver and a long-term humanitarian waiver. The United States Government will continue to work closely with international organizations and the humanitarian assistance community to address any obstacles from our sanctions. We welcome conversations with partners to work through any challenges. As the largest humanitarian donor to Syria, the United States has provided \$10.6 billion in humanitarian assistance to displaced and conflict-affected Syrians inside and outside of the regime's control and throughout the region. The Caesar Act does not change this, and we will continue our support through our various international and Syrian implementing partners.

As we have heard from our briefers, we must never play politics with the lives of the Syrian people. Syria is on the brink of famine. The number of reported COVID-19 cases, while still mercifully low, has already increased to five times what they were just one month ago, and we know there are not enough testing kits, personal protective equipment and medicine to prevent the disease from spreading in Syria.

So, I want to ask all members of the Council how they can look at the situation in Syria and not advocate for a full renewal of the cross-border mechanism for north-western and north-eastern Syria? And, as Susannah stated, how can we bargain with the lives and the health of Syrians? It just does not make sense.

The Council has a moral obligation to the Syrian people to ensure that they receive assistance, to ensure that they survive, and to ensure the cross-border mechanism is more vital now than ever in the light of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Trump Administration will answer the call to meet this obligation. We need everyone to answer this call. I urge all Council members to stand with us, and not to back down in the face of opposition from the Russian Federation as it acts to protect its political and military interests in the region.

You know, Mr. President, at the beginning of my remarks, I asked a very simple question: Will we do the right thing to save lives, or will we allow people to

die? I hope the answer to that question is evident to everyone because it really is that simple. I know where we stand, and I hope others will join me.

Let me close with a direct message to the Syrian people — many of these people I met when I travelled to the Bab Al-Hawa border crossing in March: “The United States will not waiver in our commitment to you. We will do everything in our power to get you the aid and assistance you need, the basic needs, to survive, thrive and create a better future for yourselves and your families. I personally will not rest until every child, woman and man has their needs met. The time is now. We are with you, and we will remain with you.”

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

At the outset, I join other colleagues in expressing our gratitude to all humanitarian personnel working on the ground in Syria.

I would like to thank Under-Secretary-General Mark Lowcock and Ms. Susannah Sirkin for their briefings.

First of all, we remain deeply concerned at the overall humanitarian situation in Syria, which has been compounded by the current impacts of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic and the mounting economic hardship. These extra layers are further impairing the well-being of the Syrian people as well as the vulnerable health-care system in Syria — the result of nearly a decade of conflict.

Much needs to be done to deal with the severity of the current humanitarian situation in Syria. Recent reports of the Secretary-General have pointed out worrisome facts and figures, including that more than 11 million people are in need of assistance; that 9.3 million face food insecurity, an acute shortage of basic goods and food prices that doubled to a record level in one single year; and that there are millions of displaced persons with limited access to basic requirements.

Secondly, regarding the humanitarian response in Syria, we welcome the efforts of the international community to provide assistance, including those related to COVID-19 preparedness and response capacity.

It is encouraging to see that the ceasefire agreement in the north-west continues to generally hold, which meaningfully facilitates greater assistance efforts. However, instability and the risk of escalation continue unabated, putting civilian lives in danger.

We take note of the fact that World Health Organization overland deliveries were able to reach the north-east region, along with air deliveries from other sources. However, a serious shortage of medical supplies is still reported, especially given that there are confirmed COVID-19 cases in that area.

Against that backdrop, we call on the Syrian Government, which bears primary responsibility for settling the humanitarian situation in the country, to continue to step up its cooperation with the United Nations and other relevant parties to improve the humanitarian response, especially in the north-east.

We reiterate our call on the international community to further increase humanitarian support for Syria in order to overcome this difficult moment. It is important that the international community stay entirely united in supporting people in need.

In that connection, while commending the great efforts made by United Nations agencies, contractors and other parties, we also note that the Secretary-General's report (S/2020/576) also recognizes that aid is distributed and implemented primarily by national actors and that access has been granted to United Nations agencies in a number of Syrian governorates.

To facilitate this important work, we reiterate our support for the call made by the Secretary-General and his Special Envoy for a ceasefire throughout Syria and urge all parties to heed that call and suspend all ongoing hostilities so as to create optimal conditions for sustained and unimpeded humanitarian access to various parts of Syria. It is also important to ensure that Syria's COVID-19 response capability is not affected by any type of sanctions, as the Secretary-General has urged.

The prerequisite for a sustainable resolution of all humanitarian issues in Syria is a comprehensive political solution to the conflict in that country. We would like to stress the importance of a Syrian-led and Syrian-owned process that is in line with resolution 2254 (2015), in accordance with the fundamental principles of international law and the United Nations Charter, including full respect for the principles of sovereign equality, territorial integrity and non-interference in the internal affairs of States.

Annex XVI**Statement by the Permanent Representative of the Syrian Arab Republic to the United Nations, Bashar Ja'afari**

[Original: English and Arabic]

Socrates spoke the truth when he said: “Humanity is not a religion but a rank that some people reach”. In that context, it is certain that the Governments of some Western countries that are trying to promote themselves as paragons of humanity and ethics have failed to rise to that rank. That was confirmed once again by those very same Governments when they turned a deaf ear to the appeal made by the Secretary-General on 23 March to waive unilateral coercive measures. On the contrary, they hastened to announce the extension, even the tightening, of those measures. Consequently, they failed the test of credibility and humanity.

Is the suffering of 2 billion people caused by unilateral coercive measures not worth holding emergency meetings of the Council in order to put an end to that crime against humanity and hold accountable those responsible for it? Is lifting those measures against 24 million Syrians not worth immediate action by the so-called humanitarian co-penholders instead of what we have witnessed today and at other relevant meetings of the Council — feverish efforts to promote false allegations and accusations, and failed attempts to evade responsibility for the economic terrorism and collective punishment practiced against millions of Syrian civilians?

How could one expect any sane person to believe that Germany and Belgium, as the humanitarian co-penholders and, behind them, the United States, the United Kingdom and France harbour any goodwill or humanitarian concern for the security and welfare of Syrians, at a time where they are targeting all Syrians by damaging their livelihoods, impeding their access to medicine and food for children, security and the resources of their country? In addition, those countries support the American-Turkish-Israeli occupation of parts of my country and the crimes committed directly or indirectly through proxy separatist militias and terrorist organizations. It is terribly sad for those in the world who are free to see that those countries are assuming the role of judge, jury and executioner in the Council.

The Governments of some of the members of the Council have insisted on their hostile policies towards my country to the degree that they are completely unable to play any positive or constructive role regarding the situation in my country and the region. That is attested to by the silence and pressure imposed on the Security Council by those Member States that are trying to make it into a platform for NATO.

The Governments of these countries seem to be surrendering to the whims and ambitions of the American Administration and are fond of the policies of occupation and Turkification and of the support for terrorism practiced by the Erdoğan regime on the territories of my country. Those Governments also support Erdoğan's expansionist ambitions and crimes against Syria, Iraq, Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, Armenia, Greece and Cyprus, as well as his violations of the rights of all his opponents from the friendly Turkish people. Such violations were clear in the aftermath of the alleged coup attempt. All present are fully aware of the fact that the coup was followed by massive violations of the rights of tens of thousands of civilians and Turkish State employees.

Let me be clear: even if some people dream of repeating the experience of the Turkish occupation of parts of Cyprus since 1974 in my country, we will not allow that to happen even if NATO itself is behind Erdoğan.

I invite my fellow NATO representatives in the Council to answer our questions openly and without equivocation: do they support international law and the United Nations Charter, or do they support the United States-Turkish-Israeli occupation of parts of my country?

Do they respect what is stated in the resolutions of the Council on the sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity of my country, or do they support endeavours aimed at abandoning or partitioning and continuing to destabilize the security situation and undermine stability in our region?

Do they believe in the feasibility of combating terrorism and ridding civilians of control by terrorist organizations, or is investment in terrorism permissible and desirable when it serves their agendas?

Do they believe in the principles of humanitarian work, or is the besieging and intimidation of and fighting against Syrians legitimate as long as it serves their interests and agendas?

And how do they explain their silence about Erdoğan's preventing humanitarian convoys from inside Syria from reaching the areas he occupies in the north-west, as was the case with the convoy, approved by the Syrian Government on 14 April, that was supposed to go to the Al-Atarib region and its surroundings but that has not yet been delivered by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA)?

If they prevent the Council from fulfilling its primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security, then what is the alternative international reference that can be entrusted with the purposes and principles of the United Nations?

Once again, the co-penholders are preparing a draft resolution to extend the effects of resolution 2165 (2014), on cross-border activities. I will not elaborate on my country's well-known position that rejects such resolutions, which completely depart from the assumed humanitarian goals and the provisions of General Assembly resolution 46/182. Such resolutions aim to serve the agendas of hostile Governments and infringe on the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Syrian Arab Republic on the basis of OCHA's politicized allegations and distorted reports. Such resolutions ignore the tremendous efforts exerted by the institutions of the Syrian State and its partners in humanitarian work, in cooperation with allied and friendly countries.

Resolution 2165 (2014) was an exceptional, temporary measure taken by the Security Council in specific circumstances that no longer exist. Its sustainability cannot be permitted, nor can it be strengthened by including additional crossings that serve the occupation and threaten the integrity and unity of Syrian territories. OCHA is able to operate from inside Syria and use the official approved crossings, including the Abu Kamal and Nasib crossings and Aleppo and Al-Qamishli airports.

Instead of wasting time on misleading OCHA reports and their pointless details, the Council must address the root causes of the crisis, which would consequently restore security and stability and improve the humanitarian situation. That means ending the United States-Turkish occupation and its crimes, including the destruction of Syrian infrastructure, the looting of various resources and the burning of agricultural crops. Addressing the root cause of the crisis entails supporting the efforts of the Syrian State and its allies in combating terrorism, in addition to the immediate lifting of unilateral coercive measures. The effects of those measures are not limited to the livelihoods of millions of Syrians but are also aimed, among other things, at dividing my country. That is confirmed by the notorious Caesar Act, which excluded north-eastern Syria from its provisions in order to encourage separatist

tendencies among the proxy militias of the occupation and try to create new facts on the ground.

My delegation reiterates its call on countries that have pledged and committed to respecting international law and the maintenance of international peace and security to put an end to the politicization of the humanitarian issue in my country and support the efforts of the Syrian State in the humanitarian and development domains. Those countries should also reject the political conditions and dictates set by some Governments with the aim of obstructing reconstruction and recovery efforts as well as the return of displaced Syrians.

My Government reiterates its position regarding the Brussels Conferences and stresses the fact that those conferences are nothing but a propaganda showdown aimed at implementing the agenda of certain countries that organize and participate in those conferences in a clear politicization of humanitarian work, and the imposition of their conditions, with deep-rooted obstinacy. My Government reaffirms that it does not recognize any initiatives or meetings that are held on Syria without its participation and full coordination. My Government also reiterates its demand that the United Nations not participate in such conferences, in order to maintain its impartial role and respect humanitarian work parameters under resolution 46/182.

Finally, inviting false witnesses to brief the Council is not in the interest of the noble issue that the Security Council has been striving to deal with at almost 100 meetings so far. Such invitations are a deliberate misuse of the Council's mechanisms aiming at distorting facts and misleading Member States' representatives.

The repetitive invitation of tools of fabrication to Council meetings, whether it is related to the humanitarian situation or to the political or chemical file, highlights the degree of prejudice that the enemies of Syria in the Council hold against my country and how desperate they are because they lost the bet on terrorism and sanctions during the years of the crisis.

The role of the guests invited by the Council presidency to brief it on a humanitarian situation should be a responsible and humanitarian one, not a critical, prejudiced and inciting role against my country's Government and people.

Whoever speaks about a humanitarian situation, wherever it may be, should be trustworthy and well versed in the provisions of the Charter and communication discipline.

Annex XVII

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

First, let me thank Under-Secretary-General Lowcock and Ms. Susannah Sirkin for their briefings. I would like also to commend the brave and devoted work done by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and all humanitarian organizations to reach the millions of Syrians in need.

The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic and the economic crisis have further worsened the existing humanitarian catastrophe in Syria. Millions of Syrians depend on the continuation of the cross-border operations for their survival.

In the north-west, 3 million out of 4 million Syrians are internally displaced. Nearly 1,000 tent camps are hosting more than 1.4 million displaced persons; 80 per cent of them are women and children.

To improve conditions for the internally displaced persons living in tents at the border area, we have built 11,000 brick houses so far. That is financed by our own resources but is clearly not sufficient to meet current needs. We expect donors to step in to assist in this effort.

Since the establishment of the cross-border United Nations Monitoring Mechanism for the Syrian Arab Republic, in 2014, 88 per cent of the operations have been conducted through the Bab Al-Hawa and Bab Al-Salam border crossings. Since 10 January, those two border gates have been the sole channels for aid delivery, being used by more than 7,000 United Nations trucks.

As of today, cross-border operations are continuing at record levels to respond to the acute humanitarian needs. As part of the prevention and preparedness efforts for COVID-19, approximately 11,000 test kits and thousands of other pandemic-related items are being delivered to Idlib through the Mechanism. However, this corresponds to less than 1 per cent of actual needs.

Let us be clear: there is no cross-line access from the regime-held areas to the north-west, and cross-line operations cannot substitute for cross-border assistance.

The Council knows all too well that the regime considers the legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people as terrorism, calls its own people who are looking for a better future terrorists and blames those who stand by the Syrian people as supporters of terrorism. The shameless allegations of aid diversion are the product of that sick mind.

Let me shed some light on the Monitoring Mechanism activities exclusively performed by the United Nations for cross-border humanitarian assistance. As underlined by both the Secretary-General and Under-Secretary-General Lowcock, cross-border operations are one of the most scrutinized aid-delivery systems in the world. From the start to the very end, convoys and aid items are monitored at various stages and with the most developed technologies.

In Turkey, trucks, once loaded with humanitarian items and confirmed by the United Nations Monitoring Mechanism, are accompanied by Turkish and United Nations officials from the trans-shipment area to the border crossing point. Scanners examine each truck to provide a detailed view of its contents. The system in place ensures a highly accountable, effective and transparent operation. If the cross-border mechanism is terminated, we will lose the existing means of notification, transparency, monitoring and control.

So let me ask the Council a simple question: would it prefer that humanitarian aid delivery be deprived of the benefits of this robust system?

While we have the collective responsibility to ensure the survival of those vulnerable people, will we put aside our promises and leave Syrians to the mercy of the murderous regime that has brought nothing but more suffering to its own people? Is this the future that we foresee for them?

The state of the ongoing negotiations on the renewal of the cross-border mechanism is a source of concern. This mechanism has no alternative and must continue unabated. We must do everything possible to reach each and every Syrian in need. Obstructing that goal is unjustifiable.

I would also like to touch upon the rightful appeal by 18 Syrian non-governmental organizations that requested the inclusion of Tel Abyad border crossing in the mechanism. As is well known, we have offered the Council that option in order to meet the humanitarian needs in the north-east, and it is still on the table. As I have said before, that crossing is already in use. Since November 2019, our country's authorities have channelled 412 humanitarian aid convoys through that crossing.

In four years, almost 500 attacks on health facilities killed hundreds of civilians and health-care personnel in Syria, mainly in the north-west. Respecting international humanitarian law entails protecting humanitarian workers and civilian infrastructure. The United Nations deconfliction mechanism is an indispensable instrument to that end.

Turkey will continue to be fully engaged with the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs towards the implementation of the United Nations deconfliction mechanism, and we call on all to do the same.

Given that the regime's massive military campaign against its own people forced 13 million Syrians to flee their homes and destroyed countless lives, we need more United Nations involvement in the country, not less.

In the absence of the United Nations cross-border mechanism, the besieged people of Syria will be further starved and bombed into surrender. The abuse of humanitarian issues as a matter of petty negotiations cannot be tolerated.

We should not forget that a lasting political solution can be achieved only if basic humanitarian assistance continues to reach people in need throughout the country. The termination of the mechanism would also have negative implications on the political process.

The Security Council should therefore uphold its obligation to protect civilians in Syria by renewing the cross-border mechanism for at least 12 months.

Finally, I note that this forum has been abused once again today as a platform for utter misrepresentations, lies and delusional accusations by the so-called representative of the criminal Al-Assad regime. He does not represent the Syrian people, and I will not dignify him with a reply.

Turkey will continue to be the voice of the Syrian people's demands until their legitimate aspirations are fulfilled.
