



We, a group of Syrian NGOs operating in Northwest Syria, are concerned with the state of humanitarian access into northwest Syria. Since the non-renewal of the UNSC Resolution allowing cross-border assistance, the United Nations has since shifted to a short-term and unreliable arrangement with the Syrian regime that relies on their consent to allow access of UN aid into Northwest Syria. On January 13th, 2024, the consent given to the UN by the Syrian regime, enabling UN Agencies to deliver Humanitarian assistance through Bab Al-Hawa will come to an end.

With over 4.1 million people in dire need of humanitarian assistance, whether by delivering in-kind assistance or services run by NGOs operational in NW Syria, the reliance on the ambiguous consent modality poses significant risks in the event of non-renewal or imposing conditions that could effect the principled humanitarian interventions, and prompts the need for immediate action by the UNSC.

While we welcome and support all modalities through all possible access points and avenues to alleviate the suffering of people in need, this access must uphold the principles of humanitarian action, and prioritize accountability to affected populations. In addition, we emphasize that access must be sustained, unconditional, and unhindered, all of which are threatened under this consent-based modality.

With the humanitarian situation quickly deteriorating and at its worst since the beginning of the crisis 13 years ago, a disruption to services, especially with the winter taking its toll on civilians residing in NWS, will be a huge humanitarian disaster. Recent escalation and attacks on NWS by Syrian regime forces and affiliates would mean crossline assistance will be withheld from communities already shelled and bombed. The economic situation is deteriorating with more people well under the poverty line, further worsened by the crises like COVID-19, the Cholera outbreak and more recently, the 6th of February earthquake, which NWS has faced this past year alone. The crisis has displaced and torn communities further apart, coupled with the escalation of attacks by Syrian regime and the fear of further displacement during the winter months, the 4.1 million people are more in need now than ever.

UN figures estimate that over 2.9 million people are internally displaced in NWS, with around 2 million living in camps; 90% of NWS residents are under the poverty line, and 3.7 million are food insecure and numbers are expected to rise with funding cuts. Cross-border assistance is a lifeline to these people, and the scale of cross-border aid cannot be replaced through any other modality, including crossline assistance. A number of services including health facilities, schools, protection centres, rehabilitation centres, shelters and WASH services can only be delivered through cross-border assistance, as acknowledged in UNSCR 2165. NGOs and communities in NWS are fearful of the Syrian regime withholding consent, introducing unacceptable conditions, or using its position to weaponize humanitarian assistance, given past experiences including in Aleppo, Eastern Ghouta, and other areas where civilians were deprived of all forms of humanitarian assistance when assistance to those areas relied on the Syrian regime.

We call on the UN Security Council Members to revisit the option of another UNSCR allowing UN-led Cross Border humanitarian assistance, at the same time, urge members of the UNSCR, Donors, and Governments to exert pressure on the Syrian Government to depoliticise humanitarian assistance and to allow Cross-Border humanitarian assistance to continue for an indefinite period.

- January 11, 2024

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