

Open Letter to the UN Security Council

June 22nd, 2023

The United Nations Security Council has until July 10 to renew the Syria cross-border resolution, which authorizes the UN to deliver life-saving aid to millions of Syrians in need in the northwest of the country. 32 Syrian and International NGOs are calling on the Security Council to renew the resolution for at least a period of 12 months.

Excellencies,

Next month, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) will vote on a resolution that has direct impact on the lives of over 4 million people in northwest Syria. The resolution's outcome, decided in New York, will determine whether families in Syria will have secure access to much-needed relief, including food, medical care, and shelter, that is essential for their survival.

The UN's cross-border response, facilitated by this Council, is a humanitarian and economic lifeline for Syrian families struggling to survive after more than a decade of conflict and now a devastating earthquake.

The magnitude of the multiple crises impacting northwest Syria demands the reauthorization of cross-border assistance for a minimum of 12 months. If the Council fails to renew this mechanism, it will send a message to Syrians that the Council is willing to accept preventable additional suffering and loss of life on its watch.

Prior to the 7.8 magnitude earthquake that left over 5,700 people dead, more than 10,000 injured and a further 53,000 families in need of shelter in Syria, needs across the nation were already at an all-time high. Coupled with the first cholera outbreak in over a decade in Syria, which requires a concerted and coordinated response to contain and prevent the outbreak from spreading further, the situation has become even more critical.

Today more than 15.3 million Syrians are dependent on humanitarian aid to survive. This includes 4.1 million people living in the northwest who are largely reliant on cross-border humanitarian assistance to meet their basic needs. Should the cross-border mechanism end in July, the subsequent disruption and reduction in aid flows will prove devastating for those already at breaking point.

Humanitarian realities on the ground must drive Security Council action, not politics. In 2022, the UN-led cross-border response allowed humanitarian actors to reach over 2.4 million people per month in the northwest, providing food for 1.8 million people, nutrition assistance to 120,000 people, education for 625,000 children, GBV services for women and girls, and access to critical medical items and supplies to help people survive the harsh winter months. It also enabled a scale up in early recovery assistance to help Syrians begin to rebuild their lives and reduce dependence on humanitarian aid.

In the immediate aftermath of the earthquake, the one remaining UNSC-authorized crossing point, Bab Al Hawa, was out of operation due to destroyed roads used to transport aid. A scale up of the response was supported by an emergency agreement between the Government of Syria and the UN to open two additional crossing points. However, these context-specific, bilateral, and short-term agreements do not provide stable access for planning and long-term funding and operational decisions for humanitarian organizations, and do not lessen the necessity for the UNSC to reauthorize the cross-border mechanism and access through Bab al Hawa for at least another 12 months.

Bab al Hawa, where the UN transshipment hub is located, remains the most critical supply line for the response. More than just goods, the UN Security Council mechanism props up the entire humanitarian response in the northwest, ensuring Syrian and International NGOs have access to funding through the Syria Cross-Border Humanitarian Fund and guaranteeing secure and sustained access to communities.

More importantly for Syrians in the northwest, the uncertainty about the renewal of the cross-border mechanism, coupled with the uncertainty about the bilateral agreements beyond 13 August 2023 leaves families and NGO staff in a state of high anxiety, unable to plan more than a matter of weeks ahead. Living in a state of constant uncertainty, unsure whether life-saving aid will continue, exacerbates the psychological distress faced by millions of Syrians.

The Security Council came together in 2014 to authorize cross-border humanitarian access, one of its few moments of unity in relation to this conflict. The imperative then, as it is now, was to ensure that aid reaches Syrians in a principled manner wherever they are, based on needs alone. As the UN Secretary-General has reminded the Security Council in his recent report, there is no rationale for reducing humanitarian access at a time when both more people than ever need life-saving assistance and when there is no viable alternative.

We look to you as Security Council members to ensure Syrians are afforded more, not less, humanitarian access, and that you sustain that access for at least a year. Not only will this guarantee the stability needed for international donors to more generously support humanitarian assistance and early recovery for the northwest, but it will also signal to Syrians in this part of the country that they are not forgotten and that they have a right to live in dignity and with hope.

Signed by,

Al-Sham Humanitarian Foundation

ATAA Humanitarian Relief Association

BINAA Organization for Development

CARE International

DanChurchAid

Global Communities

HelpAge International

HIHFAD (Hand in Hand for Aid and Development)

Humanity and Inclusion

Ihsan Relief and development

International Rescue Committee

Islamic Relief USA

Malteser International

MedGlobal

Mercy Corps

Mercy-USA

Norwegian Refugee Council

Oxfam International

People in Need

Physicians Across Continents

Relief International

Save the Children

SKT organization

Syria Faith Initiative

Syria Relief and Development

Syrian American Medical Society (SAMS)

Syrian Expatriates Medical Association (SEMA)

Union of Medical Care and Relief Organizations (UOSSM)

Violet Organization for Relief and Development

War Child Holland

Welthungerhilfe

World Vision International