



# Security Council

Seventy-sixth year

**8803**<sup>rd</sup> meeting

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New York

*Provisional*

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<i>President:</i>	Mr. Jürgenson . . . . .	(Estonia)
<i>Members:</i>	China . . . . .	Mr. Zhang Jun
	France . . . . .	Mr. De Rivi�re
	India . . . . .	Mr. Gupta
	Ireland . . . . .	Ms. Byrne Nason
	Kenya . . . . .	Mr. Kiboino
	Mexico . . . . .	Mr. De la Fuente Ram�rez
	Niger . . . . .	Mr. A Barry
	Norway . . . . .	Ms. Juul
	Russian Federation . . . . .	Mr. Nebenzia
	Saint Vincent and the Grenadines . . . . .	Ms. King
	Tunisia . . . . .	Mr. Ladeb
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland . .	Dame Barbara Woodward
	United States of America . . . . .	Mrs. Thomas-Greenfield
	Viet Nam . . . . .	Mr. Pham

## Agenda

### The situation in the Middle East

Report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020) and 2533 (2020) (S/2021/583)

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*The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.*

### **Adoption of the Agenda**

*The Agenda was adopted.*

### **The situation in the Middle East**

**Report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020) and 2533 (2020) (S/2021/583)**

**The President:** In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representatives of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Syrian Arab Republic and Turkey to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the following briefers to participate in this meeting: Mr. Ramesh Rajasingham, Acting Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, and Ms. Sherine Ibrahim, Country Director of CARE, Turkey.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2021/583, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020) and 2533 (2020).

I now give the floor to the Secretary-General, His Excellency Mr. António Guterres.

**The Secretary-General:** I welcome this opportunity to brief the Security Council about the humanitarian situation in Syria. My latest report (S/2021/583) is now before the Security Council, and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs will brief members in detail. I will focus my remarks on the decisions soon to be taken by the Security Council.

For many of Syria's people, the situation today is worse than at any time since the conflict began; 13.4 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance and 12.4 million people are food-insecure. The gross domestic product has plummeted by 60 per

cent since 2011. Jobs have disappeared, prices have skyrocketed and goods are scarce. People are coping by reducing the size of their meals or forgoing them all together. The economic crisis is now compounded by a drought. The water deficit in the Euphrates basin is the worst in memory. If water levels drop any lower, the Tishreen and Tabaqah dams will stop generating electricity.

The coronavirus disease pandemic is racing across the country, with high transmission rates taxing an already-fragile health-care system. And while the ceasefire is largely holding, there are constant violations, including the appalling attack on Al-Shifa hospital earlier this month. The coping strategies of the Syrian people are at their absolute limit.

The United Nations humanitarian operation in Syria is today the largest of its kind in the world. Our most recent appeal seeks \$4.2 billion to ease the country's plight. Another \$5.8 billion is being requested to support refugees in the region. As of today, we have recorded \$636 million for the Syria response and just \$600 million for the regional response. That is a fraction of what is needed. I appeal to donors to step up life-saving assistance and assistance in helping to build resilience to face such enormous challenges.

Let me turn now to the acute situation in the north-western part of the country, where the situation is the worst. More than 70 per cent of the region's population are in need, and almost all of them are in severe need of basic humanitarian assistance to survive. Some 2.7 million people are displaced. It is absolutely essential to maintain and increase our level of support.

Despite the United Nations massive response in Syria and across the region, more humanitarian access is required to reach those most in need. That is why I have been clearly expressing how important it is to maintain and expand access, including cross-border and cross-line operations. We are in dialogue with Turkey and groups in control of the area, and I have strong hopes that it will soon be possible to start cross-line operations. But we must recognize that they will never be able to replace cross-border assistance at the present levels.

I organized the first large cross-line convoys in Syria when I was High Commissioner for Refugees, and I have been following closely the current cross-line operations in the north-east. Even with such enhanced effort, the situation there has become more difficult

since the closure of cross-border operations last year. In the past 12 months, we have been carrying out massive cross-border operations in the north-west, with more than 1,000 trucks moving through a single crossing point a month. Every step of the delivery is scrupulously monitored by people on the ground to ensure that the aid is not diverted and reaches its intended beneficiaries.

I strongly appeal to the members of the Council to reach consensus on allowing cross border operations as a vital channel of support for another year. A failure to extend the Council's authorization would have devastating consequences.

The Syrian people are in dire need, and it is essential to mobilize all our capacities along all channels. Let us not forget that the solution to the Syrian tragedy can only be political. Syrians must come together to agree on their future. It is time to end the decade-long nightmare.

**The President:** I thank the Secretary-General for his introductory remarks.

I now give the floor to Mr. Rajasingham.

**Mr. Rajasingham:** Further to the Secretary-General's remarks and his most recent report (S/2021/583), I will focus my briefing today on five points — first, the ongoing spread of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19); secondly, the impact of the economic crisis; thirdly, the water crisis; fourthly, the protection of civilians and, fifthly, humanitarian access, particularly as it relates to the United Nations cross-border operation.

Let me begin with COVID-19. Transmission rates are high, with the actual spread likely exceeding official records. An already weak health system is overstretched. Shortages of materials and trained personnel continue to be reported. Vaccinations are under way across Syria. In May, vaccines from the COVID-19 Vaccine Global Access (COVAX) Facility were dispatched through all available modalities — cross-line to north-eastern Syria, cross-border to north-western Syria and within Government-controlled territories. As of 20 June, more than 97,000 people had received their first dose in Government areas and the north-east. Some 26,000 people have received at least one dose in the north-west.

Current vaccinations prioritize front-line health-care workers, helping to protect an essential group that has been at the highest risk. The pandemic has been severe for health-care workers. Each illness further depletes the already critically low number of doctors

and nurses, at a moment when all support is needed to address the pandemic. It is important, however, not to underestimate the burden of the disease in Syria. The first COVAX delivery is only sufficient for about 0.5 per cent of Syria's people. The total delivery from the COVAX Facility is expected to cover only 20 per cent of the entire population. As the Secretary-General noted last month, equal access to vaccines, tests, medicines and supplies, including oxygen, is needed to curb transmission rates, especially among the most vulnerable population, together with sustained access and additional funding.

My second point is about the impact of the economic crisis. Daily life in Syria is becoming less and less affordable. The economic crisis has profound consequences for people throughout the country. Across Syria, they face eroded employment opportunities; prices remain at record levels and goods and services are becoming scarcer. In his report, the Secretary-General notes his call more than a year ago for the waiving of sanctions that may impede access to essential health supplies, COVID-19 medical support or food in Syria.

The United Nations Population Fund has observed in recent months an increase in child and early marriage in north-western Syria. Desperate living conditions have led many families to marry off their daughters at a very young age. The vulnerabilities of children, especially girls, grow exponentially under such difficult conditions.

In May, a nationwide survey found that a growing percentage of the population faces challenges in accessing basic health services. Access to health care remains most difficult in north-eastern Syria. Some 37 per cent of interviewed households reported not being able to purchase necessary medicines. The lack of financial resources was the overwhelming reason, with 82 per cent of participants indicating that medicine was unaffordable. A shortage of medicine on the shelves was second. Essential treatments are beyond the reach of many, particularly in north-eastern Syria.

My third point concerns the water crisis in Syria. As the Secretary-General just warned, Syria faces critical water shortages, especially in the north-east. The water deficit in the Euphrates basin is the worst in memory. The Tishrin and Tabaqah dams will stop functioning if the water levels become any lower, with far-reaching impacts. Nearly 5.5 million people face reduced access to drinking water. Three million people, as well as

hospitals and other vital infrastructure, may lose access to electricity. The potential long-term consequences are severe. I urge all the parties concerned to find a solution that accounts for the needs of everyone in the region who depends on water from the Euphrates and its tributaries.

With respect to the protection of civilians, the destructive effects of a decade of armed conflict are inescapable. In April and May, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights verified that at least 150 civilians were killed, and another 154 civilians injured in 186 incidents during hostilities. Women and children made up a significant proportion of those victims. There has been an alarming increase in hostilities in north-western Syria in the last month, which has resulted in many civilian casualties and the displacement of more than 11,000 civilians.

Civilians in many parts of Syria live under constant threat, even if front lines are relatively static. Vestiges of armed conflict litter the country, and explosive remnants of war, landmines and improvised explosive devices pose a constant danger.

Amid growing needs and deepening hardship, the attack that severely damaged the United Nations-supported Al-Shifa hospital in Afrin on 12 June was all the more shocking. At least 19 civilians were killed, including three children, and 40 were injured, including a child with disabilities. Among the dead were four humanitarian workers. In total, 11 hospital staff were also injured.

The Al-Shifa hospital is one of the largest medical facilities in northern Syria. Before the attack, it provided an average of 15,000 medical services each month, including 250 specialized surgeries. The attack rendered the hospital inoperable. One missile reportedly hit the emergency room. Another landed in the delivery room, where some 350 babies were born each month. Both units were destroyed, as were the outpatient department and radiology rooms. It is not the first time that Al-Shifa hospital has come under attack, but it is the most recent attack in a long pattern that endangers patients and medical workers and jeopardizes health care in the long term. It also raises serious concerns about compliance with international humanitarian law, which prohibits attacks directed against medical facilities and requires the parties to take all feasible precautions to avoid and minimize civilian harm.

Like many other health facilities, including the Al-Atarib Surgical Hospital, hit on 21 March, the location of the hospital was well known to all parties. As the Secretary-General has stressed, and as required under international humanitarian law, all allegations of serious violations must be investigated and the perpetrators must be prosecuted, where appropriate. There must be accountability for war crimes in Syria.

My fifth point is on humanitarian access. The Security Council's authorization for the United Nations cross-border operation in Syria expires on 10 July — just 17 days from now. While the Security Council deliberates, the United Nations and its partners will continue to operate, as they have since 2014, when the Security Council first authorized the humanitarian operation across borders and conflict lines. Hundreds of trucks will continue to deliver assistance to people otherwise unable to meet basic needs. Life-saving services, such as vaccinations, will continue to be provided. Humanitarian staff will continue to help manage camps for women and children with nowhere else to go.

The United Nations and its partners will also continue to monitor its programmes to ensure assistance reaches people in need. The United Nations cross-border operation remains one of the most heavily scrutinized and monitored aid operations in the world. A failure to extend the authorization will have stark consequences. It would disrupt life-saving aid to 3.4 million people in need across the north-west, millions of whom are among the most vulnerable in Syria.

Last week, a group of 42 non-governmental organizations (NGOs) warned about such a scenario. NGOs estimate that they have capacity to meet the needs of only 300,000 people, leaving more than 1 million without food assistance. With 90 per cent of people in need requiring assistance for their survival, they would face a truly catastrophic situation. There is simply no substitute for the cross-border operation.

The United Nations and its partners spare no effort to access all people in need across north-western Syria, using all possible means. The needs are simply too great not to exhaust all options. That includes attempting to reach people in need across front lines, from within Syria. Consultations continue with relevant parties to undertake such operations as soon as possible. Despite all efforts, no such mission has been able to proceed.

A cross-line operation would provide a vital addition to the cross-border lifeline, but it could by no means replace it. Even if deployed regularly, cross-line convoys could not replicate the size and scope of the cross-border operations. Cross-line operations can complement, not substitute, a well-funded cross-border operation to north-west Syria.

When it comes to delivering life-saving aid to people in need across Syria, all channels should be made and kept available. The stakes are simply too high otherwise. Even with the massive United Nations response in Syria, more humanitarian access is required to reach those most in need of assistance. As the Secretary-General notes in his report, with more crossings and more funds, the United Nations can do more to help the increasing number of people in need in Syria. That potential remains, both for the north-west and the north-east.

I echo the Secretary-General's call to the Security Council to help ensure that the United Nations and its humanitarian partners have every opportunity to assist people in need by extending the cross-border authorization for 12 months.

**The President:** I thank Mr. Rajasingham for his briefing.

I now give the floor to Ms. Ibrahim.

**Ms. Ibrahim:** I am honoured to address the Security Council today on behalf of my organization, CARE International, and in solidarity with the humanitarian community operating in Syria. CARE has been operating in Syria since 2013. I lead CARE's work in Turkey and across the border in the north-west of Syria, where incredible partners from non-governmental organizations (NGOs) deliver aid into the hands of Syrians in need.

The humanitarian situation in Syria is dire. Imagine living in a country where approximately 90 per cent of your fellow citizens live below the poverty line and where the price of basic food items has increased 29-fold since the start of the crisis. How do you contemplate a future where the World Food Programme food baskets that you rely on to feed your family might stop? That will be the unthinkable reality for over 1 million Syrians in the north-west come September if the United Nations is not authorized to continue its cross-border operation.

My main message to the Security Council is simple: now is not the time to scale back the humanitarian

cross-border operation. Needs on the ground are higher than ever, and they will continue to rise given the financial crisis in neighbouring Lebanon, the new wave of coronavirus disease (COVID-19) infections across northern Syria, the deteriorating food situation and the looming water crisis in the north-east.

Earlier this week, CARE International and 27 other humanitarian directors addressed an open letter to the Council asking it to scale up humanitarian access into Syria. The level of the crisis demands the reauthorization of cross-border assistance to north-west Syria via the Bab Al-Hawa and Bab Al-Salam crossings for a minimum of 12 months. It also requires reinstating the Al-Yarubiyah crossing in the north-east for a similar period, as needs there have shot up by 38 per cent since the crossing closed last year.

The scale and scope of the humanitarian cross-border operation is one of the most, if not the most, complex humanitarian operation in the world. It cannot be replicated by NGOs. Despite our presence and expertise, we cannot implement the scale of procurement, transportation, warehousing, coordination and funding required to keep that critical humanitarian operation afloat. There is simply no replacement for the United Nations cross-border capacity — not now, not in six months' or in 12 months' time.

The Emergency Relief Coordinator has been clear in successive briefings to the Council that cross-line modalities are not a viable alternative to cross-border operations. As members know, there has been no single cross-line convoy to north-west Syria, where 2.5 million Syrians depend on aid. In the north-east, cross-line operations remain woefully inadequate, with approximately 70 per cent of the population experiencing severe or catastrophic levels of need. Last week, the heads of seven United Nations agencies issued a joint statement with an unequivocal message: they are convinced that, even if cross-line convoys were deployed regularly to the north-west, they could not replicate the size and scope of the cross-border operation. There is simply no alternative.

It is time for the Council to recall the Secretary-General's advice after the closure of Al-Yarubiyah, when he said that if adequate steps were not taken to ensure effective cross-line deliveries, the Council would need to authorize the United Nations to use additional crossings. That expansion in humanitarian access by the Council is now urgent, given the spike in COVID-19

cases in northern Syria. We must ensure that the nascent COVID-19 vaccination campaign will not be halted in its tracks, not only undermining the global effort to end the pandemic but also contradicting the Council's own resolution 2565 (2021) to facilitate equitable and affordable access to COVID-19 vaccines in armed conflicts and complex humanitarian emergencies.

In conclusion, I want to highlight the gender dimensions to the multiple crises faced by Syrians, which should inform the Council's deliberations on Syria. Earlier this year, CARE published a report entitled *If we don't work, we don't eat*. That quote captures the story of many Syrian women, already overburdened by prevailing gender inequality and forced to take additional roles to become breadwinners and heads of households. It also conveys their strength and resilience after a decade of conflict. Syrian women do not want handouts; they want to enjoy their rights to live in dignity.

Yet, compared to men, women struggle to find work and fair wages. Too often, they resort to desperate coping mechanisms to survive, including sending their children to work, taking them out of school, buying essential items on credit, skipping meals and marrying off their daughters to have one less mouth to feed. Unsurprisingly, maternal malnutrition affects one third of Syrian mothers. And women's mental health is another serious casualty of the situation. Adolescent girls are forced into adulthood and motherhood far too early. Confronted by a range of protection issues, they are the real forgotten victims of the crisis.

Syria must not be condemned to a deeper humanitarian catastrophe than we are witnessing today. The Council has the authority to take practical steps that will help Syrians begin to turn the tables. We trust that its decision will be based on the needs on the ground and that it will stand by the Syrian people during this hour of greatest need.

**The President:** I thank Ms. Ibrahim for her briefing.

I would like to draw the attention of speakers to paragraph 22 of presidential note S/2017/507, which encourages all participants in Council meetings to deliver their statements in five minutes or less, in line with the Security Council's commitment to making more effective use of open meetings.

I shall now give the floor to those members of the Council who wish to make statements.

**Ms. Byrne Nason (Ireland):** I make this statement on behalf of the co-penholders on the Syrian humanitarian file, namely, Norway and Ireland.

We would like to thank the Secretary-General, Mr. António Guterres; Acting Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, Mr. Ramesh Rajasingham; and the Country Director of CARE, Turkey, Ms. Sherine Ibrahim, for the briefings we just heard.

This year, we marked 10 years of conflict in Syria — one that has caused enormous suffering for the Syrian people and created a deeply embedded humanitarian crisis that continues to worsen. The facts are stark and shocking. At present, 13.4 million people in Syria are in need of humanitarian assistance — a 20 per cent increase from last year.

The Syrian people continue to bear the brunt of the ongoing conflict. We condemn the attacks on 12 June on Al-Shifa hospital in the city of Afrin, which killed and injured civilians, including health-care workers. We underline once again the obligation on all parties to conflict to respect international humanitarian law.

The impact of the reduced water levels in the Euphrates River further underlines the ongoing vulnerability in the north-east, where critical irrigation of crops and essential power supply to hospitals has been interrupted.

On 10 July, the humanitarian aid delivery mechanism renewed by resolution 2533 (2020) will expire. In the coming two weeks, Ireland and Norway, as co-penholders, will work with all members of the Security Council for the renewal of that humanitarian resolution. We must show our strong and united support for Syria's most vulnerable people.

Let me be clear. After 10 years of conflict and rising humanitarian needs in 2021, cross-border access is as essential today as it has ever been. In fact, the situation on the ground has worsened since last July, when the Security Council adopted resolution 2553 (2020). An additional 2.4 million people in Syria are in need of humanitarian assistance. Food insecurity has risen by 50 per cent — let me repeat, 50 per cent. In addition, the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) has put enormous pressure on what was already a very fragile health system. When it comes to delivering life-saving aid to people in need across Syria, we need to use all channels, both cross-line and cross-border modalities.

As we have made clear over the past six months, the approach of Ireland and Norway as co-penholders for this resolution is guided solely by the humanitarian need and the suffering of the people of Syria. Their needs are our overwhelming concern.

In the north-west, the number of people in need increased by over 20 percent in 2021. Each winter, freezing temperatures and flooding cause further hardships for the 1.6 million people living in camps and informal settlements.

In the north-east, humanitarian needs also remain high, and the situation has worsened since the closure of the Al-Yarubiyah crossing. While cross-line deliveries to that area have been scaled up, they have not been adequate to meet growing needs. As the Secretary-General's most recent report (S/2021/583) emphasizes, humanitarian organizations in the north-east continue to report limited capacity of health-care facilities and imminent stockouts of medical supplies, including critical medicines, such as insulin and cardiovascular and antibacterial medicines. With more crossings and more funds, the United Nations could do more to help the increasing number of people in need.

We have consulted broadly with Security Council members and civil society, and indeed listened carefully to the United Nations, including the Secretary-General, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and the United Nations agencies delivering the humanitarian response in Syria. The message has been very clear. A failure to renew the cross-border resolution would halt the delivery of life-saving aid to millions of people in desperate need, increasing civilian suffering in north-west Syria to levels unprecedented in a decade of conflict.

Without a renewal, the COVID-19 vaccine roll-out in the north-west would be severely disrupted. A closure would have a detrimental effect on health, food security, water, sanitation, protection and other services provided by non-governmental organizations that rely on United Nations support in logistics, financing and procurement. Put simply, a failure to renew would cause a humanitarian catastrophe in the north-west of Syria.

Humanitarian access must be facilitated to reach all civilians in need, using all possible means, including through cross-line operations. However, even if deployed regularly, we know that cross-line convoys in the north-west could not come close to replicating the size and scope of the cross-border operations. It is

worth noting here the critical role of the United Nations Monitoring Mechanism in ensuring the cross-border operation in the north-west is one of the most heavily scrutinized and monitored aid operations in the world, ensuring the humanitarian nature of all shipments in the north-west.

That brings us to the role and responsibility of the members of the Security Council to ensure that all channels for delivering life-saving aid to people in need in Syria should be made and kept available. In the coming days, Ireland and Norway, as co-penholders, will be circulating to Council members a draft resolution that will renew and expand the humanitarian aid delivery mechanism in response to the pressing humanitarian needs. As co-penholders, our approach will continue to be informed by the words of the Secretary-General, that a large-scale cross-border response for an additional 12 months remains essential to saving lives. We will remain in close contact with all members of the Council in the weeks to come in ensuring that the humanitarian needs of the people of Syria are met.

**Mr. Ladeb** (Tunisia) (*spoke in Arabic*): I would like to thank Secretary-General António Guterres for his briefing and for his most recent report on the humanitarian situation in Syria (S/2021/583). I would also thank Mr. Ramesh Rajasingham, Acting Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, and Ms. Sherine Ibrahim, Country Director of CARE, Turkey, for their briefings. I welcome the vital and noble role of the United Nations and its executive partners, including in the Syrian Arab Republic. I also welcome the representatives of Syria, Turkey and Iran, who are participating in this meeting.

Tunisia reiterates its staunch position that there is no sustainable alternative to an accelerated political settlement, in accordance with resolution 2254 (2015), to put an end to the suffering of our Syrian brothers and put Syria permanently on the path to achieving security, peace and development. In the meantime, it is essential to increase humanitarian and medical aid in order to meet the growing needs of Syrians and address the risks and vulnerability they have been facing throughout a decade of violence and terrorism, and now the coronavirus disease pandemic.

Today's briefings confirm the deterioration of the humanitarian, economic and social crisis. We can see

the complex consequences of it, with stronger impact on children, women and displaced persons.

We are deeply concerned about the worsening living situation of millions of Syrians, namely, in terms of food, medicines, fuel, vital infrastructure and essential items. It has been difficult to lead a dignified life in Syria. The shortages in basic services, such as water and electricity, could have a long-term impact on food security, health care and ways of subsistence.

We are concerned about the recent increase in violations and insecurity in Syria. Tunisia reiterates the importance of a comprehensive and lasting ceasefire throughout the country, in response to the appeal of the Secretary-General. We call on all parties to comply with international humanitarian law and to protect civilians and civilian facilities, along with medical and humanitarian staff. We also stress the need to combat terrorist organizations, which have been particularly active recently targeting security and stability in Syria.

Tunisia calls once again for increased humanitarian relief and medical efforts in line with the principles for the provision of humanitarian assistance. That aid must reach all needy Syrians quickly and without obstruction through all available means, including on the front lines and borders, while fully respecting international law and international humanitarian law.

We welcome the delivery and distribution of several doses of coronavirus disease vaccines in both the north-east and north-west of Syria in recent weeks. We urge that the distribution of vaccines should take place quickly and fairly in all parts of Syria in order to save lives and enhance relief efforts.

Tunisia hopes for a negotiated, consensus solution in the days to come that contributes to the relaunching of aid delivery across the Syrian border. We stress the importance of providing more aid through cross-line operations in a way that reflects the collective will of the Council, with a view to achieving the necessary solutions and giving priority to humanitarian needs over political considerations. That would fulfil the basic needs of and provide services to Syrians, and effectively address the coronavirus disease pandemic while ensuring sustainable funding and a predictable humanitarian response from donors, the United Nations and local organizations.

**Mr. Kiboino** (Kenya): Kenya thanks the Secretary-General for his remarks and commitment

to the people of Syria. I also thank the Acting Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, Ramesh Rajasingham, and the Country Director for CARE, Turkey, Sherine Ibrahim, for their briefings. We also welcome the representatives of Syria, Iran and Turkey.

As we draw closer to the expiry of Bab al-Hawa as the only humanitarian aid border crossing authorized by resolution 2533 (2020), the urgent need for consensus to ensure that assistance continues to reach millions of Syrian nationals in need cannot be overstated. Kenya stands with the Syrian people and underscores that the Council's decision should be underpinned primarily by their needs and the practicalities of ensuring that those needs are met.

As we heard from the Secretary-General, the humanitarian situation in Syria is worse now than ever before. Against that backdrop, Kenya is persuaded that the cross-border and cross-line mechanisms should coexist and, indeed, complement each other, with a view to ensuring continued principled humanitarian aid, including the delivery of the coronavirus disease vaccines to the millions in need, especially in north-west and north-east Syria. We encourage the Government of Syria to continue intensifying cross-line deliveries of aid, especially in north-west Syria.

Kenya is gravely concerned by the heightened insecurity across Syria. We are disturbed by the frequent improvised-explosive-device attacks, targeted killings and air strikes, which have led to fatalities, including among women and children. We find those quite unsettling. We condemn those senseless attacks, including the latest missile attack in Afrin on Al-Shifa Hospital, which resulted in 19 deaths. We also condemn the violation of critical civilian infrastructure such as hospitals and schools, especially during this time of the pandemic when there is a greater need for medical care.

We reiterate the imperative for all parties to honour the nationwide ceasefire. It is equally critical that all those responsible for these heinous attacks be fully investigated and held accountable.

The reduced water levels in the Euphrates and the Allouk water station should be addressed. If that situation continues unchecked, it could exacerbate food insecurity, shortages of drinking water and loss of electricity, among other things, further worsening the humanitarian situation.



Kenya notes that unilateral coercive measures have adversely impacted the Syrian economy and undermined the Government's efforts to provide for the vulnerable members of society. We call for the lifting of such measures.

In closing, I would like to reiterate that the Council's decision on the humanitarian situation, including the issue of cross-border and cross-line mechanisms, should be informed by the enormity of the needs and the access challenges. The matter is too sensitive and too critical to be politicized. We should bear in mind that the only solution to the conflict in Syria is a political process that should be inclusive, Syrian-led and Syrian-owned. Kenya will continue to support such a process, fully aware that a political solution would lead to a significant improvement in the humanitarian situation.

**Mr. De Rivi re** (France) (*spoke in French*): I thank the Secretary-General and the Acting Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs for their briefings. I also welcome the efforts made by CARE, Turkey, as presented by Ms. Ibrahim.

France condemns the bombings that took place on 12 June against the city of Afrin and Al-Shifa Hospital, which led to a number of civilian victims, including medical staff. Once again we are looking at a war crime; all possible light must be shed on this issue, and justice must be done.

Hostilities are ongoing in Syria, as we can see from the attacks regularly carried out by the regime against Idlib. Every effort must be made to establish a general ceasefire under the auspices of the United Nations as well as a humanitarian pause, in accordance with resolutions 2532 (2020) and 2254 (2015), as well as the appeal made by the Secretary-General.

Respect for international humanitarian law remains an obligation for all. Protecting civilians remains an absolute priority. Humanitarian and medical needs have increased by 20 per cent in the country over the past year and by 38 per cent in the north-east. More than half of the Syrian population is facing food insecurity. There is a shortage of water in the north-east, and water may soon be in short supply throughout the remainder of the country. The economic crisis, which stems from corruption and disastrous management, also explains the situation.

The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic has led to a sharp increase in the need for medical

aid. All parties, in particular the Syrian regime, must guarantee full humanitarian access. The cross-border humanitarian assistance mechanism is more than ever necessary, both in the north-west and the north-east. Cross-line aid from Damascus is far from meeting current needs and in any event cannot replace cross-border aid.

As made clear in the report of the Secretary-General (S/2021/583), only half of the authorizations requested by the United Nations are granted by the regime. The cross-border mechanism will be needed so long as humanitarian assistance is not reaching all people in need throughout the territory, on the basis of an objective needs assessment. And yet the Syrian regime continues to politicize aid, hold the Syrian people hostage and interfere with the work of humanitarian personnel. A renewal of the cross-border mechanism for at least 12 months is therefore absolutely necessary, as requested by the Secretary-General, United Nations agencies and all other humanitarian actors.

I therefore call on all members of the Council to show unity and responsibility and to take decisions based solely on humanitarian considerations. We have a moral duty: that of saving lives, countering the threat of famine and facilitating COVID-19 vaccination campaigns. That should lead us to authorize the use of the three crossing points: Bab al-Hawa and Bab al-Salam, in the north-west, and Al-Yarubiyah, in the north-east.

Finally, only a political solution in line with resolution 2254 (2015) can put an end of this humanitarian tragedy and ensure lasting stability throughout the country. Our priority today is to address the urgent situation and meet the humanitarian needs. We are contributing to that across the country. I recall that 92 per cent of the humanitarian funding pledged for 2021 comes from the European Union, its member States, the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, Japan and Norway. Until a credible political process is firmly under way, France and the European Union will not fund the reconstruction.

Finally, those present know our positions on the lifting of sanctions and normalization, which remain unchanged. The use of the sanctions issue to conceal the regime's overwhelming responsibility deceives no one.

**Ms. King** (Saint Vincent and the Grenadines): I thank the Secretary-General, His Excellency

Mr. António Guterres, the Acting Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, Mr. Ramesh Rajasingham, and Ms. Sherine Ibrahim for their briefings.

After 10 years of war, a political solution to the Syrian conflict is still absent and the Syrian people continue to pay the highest price with their untold suffering. Their despair is further deepened by the severe socioeconomic decline, which has precipitated commodity shortages and acute food insecurity. Furthermore, the continued application of unilateral coercive measures has had an indirect adverse impact on life-saving humanitarian operations and has hindered the country's overall socioeconomic recovery. That remains a primary concern, and we reiterate our appeal for the lifting of those sanctions for the benefit of the Syrian people.

Syria's arduous road to recovery is also highly reliant on the international community's goodwill in providing reconstruction aid, without which millions will be deprived of vital social services and safe and dignified living conditions. Support for the rehabilitation of the country's basic infrastructure is therefore urgently needed.

Unquestionably, Syria is one of the worst humanitarian crises of our time. Needs are steadily rising across the country, and women and children are disproportionately affected. Addressing the multidimensional and complex challenges requires continued constructive engagement with the Syrian Government and international humanitarian agencies. It further demands the preservation and the scaling-up of both the cross-border mechanism and the cross-line modality. There remains no alternative to ensuring timely, safe, sustained and unimpeded humanitarian access, in line with the humanitarian principles, to those desperately in need in Syria. Failure to reauthorize the mechanism not only will put an end to the critical lifeline of aid to millions but also will create disruptions in the distribution of the much-needed coronavirus disease vaccines. It is imperative that humanitarian assistance not be politicized and that the Syrian people be prioritized.

We are deeply concerned by the worsening situation in the Euphrates River basin. Drought and other troubling factors have led to alarmingly low water levels. Millions are dependent on its supply for drinking water, the irrigation of crops and the generation of

electricity. A sustainable solution to safeguard lives and livelihoods must be pursued. On that point, we recall that water and water systems should never be weaponized.

Civilians are forced to endure the consequences of the continued hostilities across Syria. Regrettably, death, displacement and the destruction of essential civilian infrastructure are an everyday occurrence. A nationwide ceasefire is therefore immediately needed for the protection of civilians and to guarantee the uninterrupted delivery of humanitarian aid. Attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure, in violation of the fundamental principles of international law, must be met with condemnation, and the perpetrators of those indefensible acts must be held accountable.

Also on civilian protection, the deteriorating security situation in displacement camps, particularly in Al-Hol, is disturbing. Civilians residing and working in those camps must be afforded safety and access to basic services. That necessitates immediate action.

As has been said many times in this Chamber, there is no military solution to the Syrian conflict. A Syrian-led and Syrian-owned political process, in line with resolution 2254 (2015), is the only viable path to peace, stability and the protection and prosperity of the Syrian people.

**Mrs. Thomas-Greenfield** (United States of America): I thank Secretary-General Guterres for his briefing and for joining us today. I also wish to thank Mr. Rajasingham and Ms. Ibrahim for their briefings.

Today the Security Council is being confronted with a critical decision: what we communicate to millions of Syrians about the dire situation that they are in and whether we plan to continue to provide crucial humanitarian aid cross-border. Three weeks ago, I travelled to the Turkish-Syrian border and I visited Bab Al-Hawa. There I met with United Nations front-line workers, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and refugees, who shared devastating stories about what they faced after a decade of conflict. I went because I wanted the Syrian people to know that they are not forgotten and because I wanted to see with my own eyes how the cross-border mechanism works so that I could speak first-hand about it.

We all agree that, after 10 years of war, Syria is among the world's worst humanitarian disasters. The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) has only made the

situation worse. As I shared with Members earlier, when I spoke to one humanitarian worker, who told me that for Syrian refugees COVID-19 was “another reason to die”. For millions of Syrians, Bab Al-Hawa is a literal lifeline. As we have heard, every month 1,000 trucks carry food, nutritional assistance, clean water and medical supplies to people living in desperate need. The Syrian refugees and courageous United Nations humanitarian workers with whom I met on the border warned me over and over again that, without cross-border access, thousands of children will be denied food and be permanently stunted in their growth and cognitive development. Others will die because health facilities will no longer have supplies. Millions of people will have reduced access to clean water, medical supplies and, of course, vaccines.

They are terrified that that is the choice the Security Council will make. Tragically, their fears are not unfounded because that is exactly what the Council has done to them before. As we all know, there used to be four crossings for humanitarian aid into Syria. Now there is only one. The most recent closures constricted aid at precisely the moment that COVID-19 exacerbated the humanitarian needs on the ground. When Al-Yarubiyah closed, hospitals and NGOs were cut off from supplies. It took months for medical supplies to be re-routed. By the time they reached the people in need nearly a year later, medicines and vaccines had expired, and medical kits had been ransacked of their contents along the way. The NGOs I spoke with told me that anything less than a 12-month renewal of Bab Al-Hawa would once again upend their operations outright.

We also benefit from robust United Nations monitoring, which those present heard about today. The rigour and professionalism that I saw at the border crossing is the same gold standard that I have seen from the United Nations throughout my four decades evaluating humanitarian missions as a United States diplomat. At Bab Al-Hawa I saw first-hand how the teams confirmed the contents of the boxes and sealed up the trucks. I saw how they have four points of verification: the border, the warehouse in Syria, the distribution centre and after-distribution to beneficiaries. We need to strengthen as well as expand this operation. We are committed to maximizing humanitarian relief to the Syrian people, which is why we support renewing and expanding this mandate with all modalities of assistance — and to do so with urgency.

Syria’s economic woes are the result of the Al-Assad regime’s gross corruption and mismanagement of the Syrian economy. With respect to cross-line aid, it can be part of the equation, but it is completely insufficient to meet the needs of millions of desperate people inside of Syria today.

Now we have made clear we are willing to work with our partners to expand all forms of assistance to Syrians in need — cross-border as well as cross-line. We are open to it, as are others. But hard truth is that, right now, this is a hypothetical solution with more than a few practical limitations. And ultimately, it is not our choice to make here today.

Here is our choice. Do we ensure our humanitarian aid continues to be monitored from start to finish? Do we follow through with our commitment to end the coronavirus-disease pandemic? Do we help Syrians in desperate need? Without cross-border access, more Syrians will die, and we know that. Front-line United Nations workers know it. Non-governmental organizations know it. Al-Assad knows it. Syrian refugees and internally displaced people know it as well. Everybody knows this. That is why the Council has a duty to reauthorize Bab Al-Hawa, as well as Bab Al-Salam and Al-Yarubiyah. It does not take much: a technical rollover for 12 months for three crossings. We should do it now, and not leave mothers and fathers wondering if they will be able to feed their children on 11 July.

Our mandate in the Security Council is to maintain peace and security. We will undermine that mandate and the credibility of this organ if we are responsible for cutting off millions of people from the food, water and medical assistance they need to survive. We have an obligation to extend the mandate. We must vote for a renewal.

**Mr. Gupta (India):** Let me begin by thanking Secretary-General António Guterres for his briefing. I also thank Acting Under-Secretary-General Ramesh Rajasingham for his update on the humanitarian situation in Syria. I thank Ms. Sherine Ibrahim of CARE for providing us with insights into the challenges from the perspective of civil society based in Damascus.

As we hear these briefings regularly, it is abundantly clear that the decade-long violence and terror has caused devastating impact on the lives of Syrians. More than 11 million people across Syria are in dire need of humanitarian assistance in one

form or another. Syrian women, children and elderly persons have been impacted in disproportionate ways. The displaced population and those who have chosen to return to their homes are facing a grim situation across all of Syria. The worsening exchange rate, the increasing cost of food and fuel shortages are affecting both the population and humanitarian operations alike. The presence of foreign forces and external support to armed groups are only making the situation worse.

The unfolding pandemic and the adverse impact of sanctions on health facilities and humanitarian operations have further exacerbated the situation. Both the Secretary-General and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs have repeatedly spoken about the impact of sanctions on humanitarian operations. These measures need to be reviewed so as to ensure that the country's capacity to access and absorb humanitarian assistance and medical support is not hindered. We are encouraged by the ongoing technical dialogue between relevant Member States and humanitarian actors on this issue.

We have consistently been calling for enhanced and effective humanitarian assistance to all Syrians throughout the country without any discrimination, politicization or preconditions. What we need immediately is active engagement that is consistent with the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of Syria and that addresses the urgency of the humanitarian issues to alleviate the suffering of the Syrian people. We need concrete steps to address hurdles that are obstructing the functioning of both cross-border and cross-line operations, especially as we are barely a few weeks away from the mandate-renewal deadline for the humanitarian aid-mechanism resolution.

While the Council's attention is focused on mandate renewal, terrorist groups such as Hayat Tahrir Al-Shams and the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant are attacking civilians in rural Idlib and Hama and in the north-east of Syria. The infighting among armed groups in the region has continued to endanger civilians. The fighting along the front lines in the north-west is threatening the lives of civilians and hospitals. India strongly condemns the attacks of 12 June on the Al-Shifa hospital in the city of Afrin, in northern Syria.

Moreover, we cannot turn a blind eye to the issue of presence of the almost 8,800 third-country nationals, including women and children, in Al-Hol camp. This issue also needs to be addressed with all seriousness.

On the positive side, we are happy to note deliveries of vaccines from the COVID-19 Vaccine Global Access (COVAX) Facility to Syria, including in the north-west. The supplies from COVAX should cover around one fifth of the population. Although grossly inadequate, this is still a vital first step to protect medical workers and the most vulnerable.

We note that some countries in Europe and the Middle East have started to re-establish their diplomatic presence in Syria. We welcome re-establishing formal channels of communication. That will help to bring the dire humanitarian situation into sharper focus, especially for the international donor community. We would also like to flag the need for undertaking rehabilitation and reconstruction measures as well.

On the bilateral front, India has extended development assistance and human resource-development support to Syria through the provision of lines of credit for industrial and infrastructure projects, the supply of medicine and food, the organization of artificial limb-fitment camps and capacity-building training programmes.

In conclusion, India reiterates its steadfast commitment to supporting the people of Syria in these difficult times.

**Mr. Pham (Viet Nam):** I thank Secretary-General António Guterres and Acting Under-Secretary-General Ramesh Rajasingham for their remarks. I also thank Ms. Sherine Ibrahim for sharing her insights. I welcome the participation of the representatives of Syria, Turkey and Iran in today's meeting.

Let me start by expressing our grave concern over the deterioration of the humanitarian situation in Syria. It has been getting worse due to the economic crisis and the impacts of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19).

Food insecurity, shortages of fuel and basic goods, as well as the severity of the ongoing pandemic, continue to aggravate the predicament of the Syrian people throughout the country. The number of people in need has been on the rise, especially in the past year. It is now around 13.4 million people — over 20 per cent higher than in 2020.

Water insecurity relating to the Euphrates River in the north-east is causing serious challenges in terms of water supply for 5 million people and electricity supply for another 3 million. The issues concerning the Allouk water station and various internally displaced person camps remain unsettled.

In the meantime, protection concerns continue to be highlighted. Even though this might be the calmest period of the crisis, instability continues to claim civilian lives. Civilian infrastructure and humanitarian work are being affected by violence, including the most recent incident at Al-Shifa hospital in Afrin.

My delegation therefore calls on all parties to refrain from actions that could cause further deterioration in the situation. Efforts to combat terrorist groups designated by the Security Council should continue. At the same time, well-coordinated actions are needed to best ensure respect for international law, including international humanitarian law and relevant Security Council resolutions.

While there is no end in sight to the humanitarian crisis, safe and unimpeded and sustained humanitarian access should be maintained in order to enhance the humanitarian response. All efforts and all appropriate channels need to be explored and employed, as appropriate, to meet the needs of the people.

We take note with encouragement of the fact that measures to prevent COVID-19 are no longer considered a significant impediment to humanitarian activities. We are pleased to see that no major operational challenges to the World Health Organization deliveries in the north-east were recorded in April and May. However, given the high demand for medical supplies, coordination among parties in control must be enhanced, and procedures to further facilitate shipments to this area must be simplified.

The situation in north-west remains dire. Some 3.4 million people are in need of assistance, most of whom are internally displaced persons. One of every three children of under the age of five is affected by chronic malnutrition. A great number of civilians are depending on the delivery of life-saving aid. The continued operation of the humanitarian system for people in this area through appropriate consultation with relevant parties is critical. For that reason, it is important that the Council reach consensus in finding a solution to this issue.

Meanwhile we call for dialogue among parties to reach agreement on the modality of cross-line delivery to the north-west.

As the COVID-19 situation worsens, the distribution of vaccines and other medical goods is crucial. We call for continued support for the Syrian

fight against the pandemic. Our delegation also supports the Secretary-General's appeal for a waiver of sanctions that hinder the humanitarian response to the pandemic. We commend the efforts of United Nations humanitarian and health-care workers on the ground and welcome the commitments of international partners to supporting Syria.

In conclusion, my delegation calls for the continuation of vital support for the Syrian people during this challenging time. It is essential that international efforts be coordinated to achieve the desired result. In the long run, we believe that the only viable way out of this humanitarian crisis is through a comprehensive political solution that is led and owned by the Syrians, in line with resolution 2254 (2015) and is in full accordance with international law.

**Mr. Abarry (Niger)** (*spoke in French*): Through you, Mr. President, I would like to thank the Secretary-General for his introductory remarks and his tireless commitment to humanitarian action in Syria. My thanks also go to Mr. Ramesh Rajasingham, Acting Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, and Ms. Sherine Ibrahim for their very inspiring briefings. I also welcome the participation of the representatives of Iran, Syria and Turkey in this meeting.

Let me commend the daily efforts of humanitarian organizations that continue unflinchingly to assist Syrian populations in need throughout their country. The humanitarian situation in Syria remains worrying and has even significantly deteriorated in the last year. The sharp drop in the value of the Syrian pound, as a result of the embargo and other unilateral coercive measures, has worsened the daily lives of Syrians, which have already been weakened by a decade of conflict. In this context, we call for the easing or suspension of unilateral economic sanctions, which may also undermine Syria's ability to deal with the coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19).

Further, from the detailed and factual briefings we received this afternoon, it is clear that the humanitarian aid provided in Syria falls far short of the real needs of the affected populations. The number of food-insecure people in Syria has reached worrying proportions. For millions of people, including women and children, United Nations assistance remains their only recourse in trying to meet their most basic food, water and sanitation needs. A substantial improvement in the

delivery mechanism for this assistance is therefore sorely needed throughout the country. We would also like to see the assessments of the humanitarian situation done by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs reflect the direct or even indirect impact of unilateral sanctions against Syria.

The Niger notes with concern the increase in the rate of COVID-19 spread in Syria, particularly in the north-west and north-east. The weakened health infrastructure and continued insecurity make it difficult to support the effective roll-out of vaccination against the virus across the country. In this regard, it is important to heed the calls of humanitarian organizations working on the ground for increased humanitarian assistance to the millions of Syrians in destitution and distress.

The Niger supports the continuation of the mechanism for the delivery of aid through border crossings and across the lines of contact and remains ready to support any formula or modality to accelerate the delivery of humanitarian aid, including medical supplies and equipment, which the Syrian health system badly needs to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic.

My delegation regrets that, despite the Secretary-General's call for a ceasefire in March 2020, hostilities persist in Syria, with nearly 186 incidents cited in the report under review (S/2021/583), resulting in dozens of deaths and injuries, including of women and children. We reiterate our appeal to all parties to respect their obligations to protect civilians and allow rapid, safe and unhindered access to all humanitarian workers and assistance to those in need throughout the Syrian Arab Republic.

In conclusion, Niger believes that reaching the needy in Syria is not a political choice but a humanitarian imperative. The Security Council must not abandon these vulnerable populations, some of whom have been repeatedly displaced by the continuing violence in the country. It remains clear, of course, that, as has been constantly reiterated this afternoon, only a political solution can have a positive impact on all aspects of the crisis, including its humanitarian dimension. It is our hope that the Security Council will regain its unity during the process of renewing the mandate of the mechanism in the coming days.

**Mr. Zhang Jun** (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): China thanks Secretary-General Guterres, Acting Under-Secretary-General Rajasingham, of the Office for the

Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), and Ms. Ibrahim for their briefings.

We also welcome the participation of the representatives of Syria, Iran and Turkey in today's meeting.

China has carefully studied the report of the Secretary-General (S/2021/583). The humanitarian situation in Syria is facing multiple challenges. A declining economy, sharp depreciation of its currency, severe food insecurity, rapid transmission of the coronavirus disease and oil shortages have affected both agricultural production and humanitarian relief operations.

Improving the Syrian humanitarian situation requires joint global efforts and a holistic approach. It is important to have the Syrian Government fully play its leading role and continue to scale up cross-line humanitarian relief operations.

China appreciates the humanitarian assistance provided by the World Food Programme, UNICEF, the United Nations Population Fund and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), which has been delivered to millions of people every month through cross-line operations. During April this year, the World Health Organization provided from within Syria 348,000 instances of medical services to civilians in north-eastern Syria, which fully proves the effectiveness and feasibility of cross-line assistance and also points to room for further expansion. Early on, the Syrian Government approved cross-line humanitarian aid operations into north-west Syria, and relevant international humanitarian organizations are also making efforts in this regard.

The United Nations should strengthen cooperation with the International Committee of the Red Cross and other relevant humanitarian agencies and make every effort to open up the cross-line access from Damascus to Idlib. When considering a draft resolution on humanitarian issues in Syria, the Council should put forward specific requirements for scaling up cross-line humanitarian assistance.

Unilateral sanctions and economic blockades must be lifted immediately to help Syria restore normal order. Years of illegal sanctions have severely damaged Syria's economic and social development, exacerbated its humanitarian crisis and weakened its ability to respond to the coronavirus disease pandemic. Many

humanitarian agencies have shared their observations that humanitarian relief funds often cannot be remitted within Syria owing to financial institutions trying to avoid the risk of being sanctioned.

Syrian infrastructure, such as water stations, hospitals and schools, are often unable to function, owing to the lack of equipment resulting from sanctions, such as power generators. The so-called humanitarian exemption, frankly speaking, is nothing but a placebo for the conscience and a hypocritical cover up. As unilateral sanctions remain in place, the humanitarian situation in Syria will not improve in any meaningful way. Secretary-General Guterres, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs have repeatedly expressed their concern about the humanitarian consequences of unilateral sanctions and called for the lifting of relevant measures. That has garnered the support of the overwhelming majority of Member States.

The Secretary General, in both his briefing today and in his report submitted to the Council (S/2021/583), once again laid out in detail the humanitarian consequences of the sanctions and expressed his concern. The Council should uphold justice, face up to the issue and provide a definitive answer to the Syrian people and the broader membership. As we have repeatedly said, we care for the people of Syria. Such loving care should not be an empty political declaration.

It is necessary to continue to rely on dialogue and consultations to properly resolve differences on the renewal of the authorization for the cross-border mechanism. China's consistent position is that the international community should deliver humanitarian assistance to Syria based on respect for its sovereignty and territorial integrity. We have always been concerned about the problems arising from the cross-border mechanism. At the same time, China takes note of the United Nations humanitarian operations under way in the north-western part of Syria through the cross-border mechanism.

The Council should specify clear requirements for cross-border humanitarian assistance, monitor the entire process, demonstrate neutrality and transparency and ensure that the aid is not used for other purposes. It is necessary to perform regular reviews of the relevant monitoring mechanisms by the Council and require that

the mechanisms provide more detailed updates to prevent inadequate monitoring and inaccurate information.

In the past two years with regard to the Syrian issue, the Council has been majorly divided on several occasions. That not only hampers problem-solving but also damages mutual trust among all parties and undermines the authority and image of the Council. The Council should solve problems in a more pragmatic way, focus on specific goals and push all parties to find compromise solutions through dialogue and negotiations to avoid serious confrontation.

China has always maintained that the Syrian issue should be dealt with through a comprehensive and integrated approach, taking into account, political, counter-terrorism, security and humanitarian aspects. We urge all parties to step up dialogue and consultations, actively promote the Syrian-led and -owned political process and work together towards a peaceful, just and appropriate settlement of the Syrian issue as soon as possible.

**Dame Barbara Woodward** (United Kingdom): I thank the Secretary-General and our briefers today.

As we start deliberations on the cross-border mechanism, humanitarian need should be front and centre of our decision-making; 13.4 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance across Syria, which is more than the entire population of London or Moscow.

Seven years ago, we came together to adopt resolution 2165 (2014), authorizing the cross-border mechanism. As we heard from Sonia Khush, Director of Save the Children, in February (see S/2021/206, annex II) and Amani Ballour in March (see S/2021/315, annex III), that created a vital system whereby humanitarian assistance could reach all Syrians, wherever they lived.

Earlier this week, 27 non-governmental agencies operating in Syria wrote to the Security Council asking for an expansion of the mandate to ensure the continued delivery of food, shelter, protection and other life-saving services. The United Nations has repeatedly outlined the implications of non-renewal. The United Nations vaccination programme would cease. The provision of food assistance to 1.4 million people a month would end, and critical medical items, which supported 10 million treatments in 2020, would stop. Ending the cross-border mandate would cut off the

last lifeline into the country for millions of vulnerable Syrians in the north-west.

The issue of cross-line access continues to be debated. Let me be clear: the United Kingdom supports all efforts to improve cross-line assistance. But we should recognize the impact of the loss of the Al-Yarubiyah crossing in the north-east, where needs have risen by 38 per cent since January 2020. Health-care facilities now face chronic shortages of medications such as insulin, painkillers and drugs used to treat chronic diseases.

The loss of the Bab Al-Salam crossing, in the north-west, has had a similarly huge impact. Assistance now travels across lines of control and multiple checkpoints. Air strikes in areas facing conflict have damaged warehouses and destroyed trucks carrying humanitarian supplies. If deliveries are able to make it through undamaged, there are persistent delays, often lasting up to three weeks.

Without expansion, therefore, we cannot tackle the growing food crisis or overcome the impact of the coronavirus disease pandemic and fulfil the requirements of resolution 2565 (2021) to ensure equitable access to vaccines. That is why we continue to insist that we should approach this mandate and issue on the basis on humanitarian need, renew the mandate for Bab Al-Hawa and re-authorize the crossings at Bab Al-Salam and Al-Yarubiyah. Anything less would be a dereliction of our responsibility to the 13.4 million Syrian people who remain in need of assistance.

**Mr. De la Fuente Ramírez** (Mexico) (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank the Secretary-General for his remarks. I also thank Acting Under-Secretary-General Ramesh Rajasingham and Ms. Sherine Ibrahim for their briefings. I also welcome the representatives of Syria, Turkey and Iran to today's meeting.

Regrettably, as we heard in today's briefings, the humanitarian situation for the people of Syria remains critical. Armed conflicts, air attacks and the use of improvised explosive devices are ongoing, to mention only a few of the violent incidents that in turn hinder the delivery and distribution of humanitarian aid of all kinds.

Despite calls from the Security Council, civilian infrastructure remains a target of attacks. As others have done, we strongly condemn the attack on the Al-Shifa hospital in Afrin on 12 July, in which at least

19 people died, including children and humanitarian and health-care staff. Such acts are at variance with international humanitarian law and are inexcusable. They must be investigated and those responsible must be punished.

The Security Council must take prompt decisions. The authorization for the Bab Al-Hawa border crossing will expire shortly. As we heard, nearly 3.4 million people in the north-west of the country are in need of humanitarian aid. Therefore, it is not only vital to maintain current access but we must also streamline operations so as to reduce shortages and relieve the suffering of the population.

As the Secretary-General and humanitarian agencies have reiterated, the Bab Al-Hawa crossing is essential for the people living in the north-west of Syria to obtain food, medical attention and education. Without the renewal of its authorization, one of many critical issues will be exacerbated — childhood malnutrition. It is estimated that one in every three children under the age of five in that area already suffers from chronic malnutrition, and the interruption of food aid will worsen that dire situation.

Other essential services — such as health and education — will also be affected if the authorization for the crossing is not renewed. Medicine, surgical supplies and coronavirus disease vaccines pass through Bab Al-Hawa. As we heard, the vaccine roll-out began only a few weeks ago; we cannot interrupt that process. The cross-border mechanism also allows for the payment of teaching staff and the costs of teaching material. Education in the region depends on the border crossing. It is clear that unfettered humanitarian access is essential.

The difficult situation on the other side of the country has also worsened in recent months, and conditions in the Al-Hol camp, including medicine shortages, are worrisome. Since the closure of the Al-Yarubiyah crossing in January 2020 and despite efforts to increase cross-line operations, it has not been possible to replace the aid received through that border crossing, in particular in the context of the fight against the pandemic. We would like to hear from the Acting Under-Secretary-General about other ways the region has been affected due to the closure of the Al-Yarubiyah border crossing.

In short, 10 years of conflict have led to serious humanitarian consequences. We hope that the Council



can explore, without bias, all options to facilitate humanitarian access for Syria. It would be indefensible to cut off options for the delivery of humanitarian aid even as the needs of the people are increasing.

**Mr. Nebenzia** (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): I would like to make it clear that I will be unable to facilitate the President's request. In any event, it is more a recommendation than a request, according to note S/2017/507 by the President of the Security Council, to speak for no longer than five minutes when taking the floor in the Security Council. There are at least three reasons for that. First and foremost, it is a mere recommendation. Secondly, we believe that discussion on today's issue should not be limited with a stopwatch. We also believe that many delegations would like to hear what we have to say today. Thirdly, we also have questions for both briefers and look forward to hearing responses to them. I promise not to disappoint. What we have to say will be interesting.

First, we thank Secretary-General Guterres for his introductory remarks. We also thank Mr. Ramesh Rajasingham and Ms. Sherine Ibrahim for their briefings.

The distressing remarks made by colleagues in the Council today paint a black-and-white picture of Syria's humanitarian landscape. Western countries present themselves as forces for good in the dispute on the future of the cross-border mechanism for humanitarian assistance in Syria, as they continually express their concern about the people, in particular the children, of Idlib. At the same time, Russia and Syria are presented as evil incarnate, indifferent to the suffering of the most deprived and ready to cut off the last supply route for meeting their basic needs.

But is that true? Let us be frank. Back in 2014, when the Security Council adopted resolution 2165 (2014), which opened four Syrian border crossings to ensure United Nations humanitarian assistance, Russia agreed to that plan — even though it violated Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity — for only one reason. The Syrian Arab Republic was being torn apart by terrorists and Syrian statehood itself was under threat. At the time, refugees and internally displaced persons were in urgent need of humanitarian assistance. Since then, with the support of Russian air forces who arrived in Syria at the request of its legitimate Government, Damascus has pushed back the terrorists, liberated nearly 90 per cent its territory and made great efforts to improve the life of the Syrian people.

In such conditions, the cross-border mechanism is an anachronism. However, our Western partners are acting as if nothing has changed. They insist on disregarding the fact that it is possible and sometimes even easier to provide assistance to the remaining refugees from within Syria.

Last year, when the Council adopted resolution 2533 (2020), we agreed to preserve the cross-border mechanism until 10 July, having clearly indicated the importance of developing sustainable cross-line humanitarian deliveries to Idlib. We stated that the future of the cross-border mechanism would depend on whether or not opportunities would be used to provide deliveries from within Syria. While we acknowledge that it is not easy to agree on such deliveries, we relied on the goodwill of our colleagues. However, even the United Nations-Syrian Arab Red Crescent-International Committee of the Red Cross convoy that received clearance from Damascus in April last year never got under way. No Council member has acted to make that happen.

Over the past year, thanks to the goodwill of the parties, there has been plenty of time and opportunity to achieve a painless and constructive solution and find the optimal formula for supplying Idlib via both the Bab Al-Hawa crossing and intra-Syrian channels. Yet not a single attempt has been made in that regard, and all that we have heard is that the cross-border mechanism would have to be extended. That is not a constructive approach.

I was surprised by some of the remarks made by today's briefers. For example, Mr. Rajasingham said that cross-line deliveries were a vital addition to cross-border assistance — and therefore complementary to, but not a replacement for, the cross-border mechanism. It is strange to hear such a statement by a high-ranking representative of the United Nations, namely, the Acting Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, who is clearly familiar with the provisions of General Assembly resolution 46/182, on humanitarian assistance.

We were equally surprised to hear the Secretary-General say in his opening remarks that cross-line delivery will never be able to replace the cross-border mechanism in its current capacity. How are we supposed to interpret that? Does that mean that the mechanism will remain the same? I cannot interpret it any other way.

There is one more question I would like to ask. Has anyone asked the country on whose territory humanitarian assistance is being provided what it thinks about the cross-border mechanism? Do the words spoken here today about our commitment to Syria's sovereignty mean nothing?

It is ridiculous to say that deliveries across the contact lines are ineffective or impossible. United Nations representatives in Syria clearly acknowledge that a well-managed mechanism for the cross-line delivery of aid, following the closure of the Al-Yarubiyah crossing point, has allowed them to achieve better results beyond the Euphrates River than through the cross-border mechanism. The coverage of humanitarian needs in the north-east has increased from 35 per cent to 45 per cent, and there is every possibility to further build up operations.

To compensate for the closure of Al-Yarubiyah, we have had to increase humanitarian assistance in the north-east. As I mentioned, that has been acknowledged by United Nations personnel themselves. In that regard, I have heard on many occasions that assistance in the north-east following the closure of Al-Yarubiyah is in fact in a worse state than when the crossing was still open.

It has been reported that the World Food Programme has already reached an agreement with Damascus and is seeking approval from other parties to bring food into Syria through its warehouse in Sarmada, in the de-escalation zone in the north-west. Where is the unwillingness to cooperate on Syria's part? If we are talking about how to make the delivery of supplies to Idlib more efficient, then we have only to look at the map — the logistics from Aleppo are much easier. It is not a matter only of logistics but also of oversight of the aid being sent. The United Nations Monitoring Mechanism has received much praise, given that in its absence the enclave would apparently be flooded with unmonitored deliveries.

At the same time, there has been silence about the fact that the levels of smuggling and United Nations humanitarian aid deliveries through the cross-border mechanism have long been equivalent. Mr. Lowcock himself recently admitted that the volume of United Nations supplies through the Bab Al-Hawa crossing did not exceed 50 per cent. In other words, United Nations channels are being openly used for dubious schemes for the benefit of terrorists in Idlib. Is that really what

the Council considers to be the optimal way to provide humanitarian assistance?

All resolutions related to the delivery of cross-border assistance request that the Secretary-General include in his reports detailed information on the humanitarian assistance delivered through United Nations humanitarian cross-border operations, including on the number of beneficiaries, the locations of aid deliveries at the district level and the volume and nature of items delivered. Yet nothing has been done to improve the transparency of cargo flows in the seven years that the cross-border mechanism has been in operation. The reason for that is clear: there is no United Nations presence in Idlib. The United Nations is simply not capable of reliably distributing those goods.

Why is it that, for seven years now, we have been asked to take the word of unnamed non-governmental organizations, many of which make no secret of their affiliation with Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham fighters? Why is it that, on the basis of their more than questionable reports, we have come to the conclusion that there is no alternative to the cross-border mechanism? I would like to hear just one reason to justify that, given that no effort whatsoever has been made to deploy supplies across the contact lines.

As for the accusations against the Syrians regarding their alleged obstruction of the work of the United Nations on Government-controlled territory, including in the context of the alleged non-issuance of permits for humanitarian operations, we are dealing with a trivial manipulation of the facts. The three latest reports of the Secretary-General (S/2021/160, S/2021/390 and S/2021/583) track both the number of permits issued and the coverage of the recipients of humanitarian aid. In particular, they highlight the trend that Syrians have issued fewer and fewer United Nations humanitarian assistance authorizations with each reporting period: 257 from December 2020 to January 2021, 167 from February to March 2021 and 93 from April to May 2021. However, reports over the same periods confirm that the number of recipients of aid from within Syria remains at the same level — approximately 3.5 million people.

Unfortunately, no one at the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) has taken the trouble to analyse the situation. Had they done so, the reports would have shown that the effectiveness of United Nations humanitarian operations is actually increasing. There are fewer requests for operations

for the same level of assistance. According to United Nations personnel working on the ground, there are no complaints against the Syrian authorities. The issue is now a different one and the realities have long changed. The effectiveness of humanitarian operations should be evaluated not by the number of convoys or the volume of deliveries — we are not dealing with one-off actions, as was previously the case — but by the ability of humanitarian personnel to be constantly present where needed.

We cannot consider the issue of the extension of the cross-border mechanism in isolation from the situation in Idlib. The enclave has long been a safe haven for terrorists in Syria. In addition to the spread of unvanquished fighters from Hayat Tahrir Al-Shams and Huras Al-Din, the north-west has been receiving new jihadists fleeing from Al-Hol and elsewhere. The terrorists radicalizing Idlib are using ordinary Syrians as human shields, establishing total control over the population. Those wishing to leave that hotbed of instability are not allowed to enter Government territories, and exceptions are not even being made to allow schoolchildren to take their exams.

We can only guess at the morals imposed by the interim rulers of Idlib. Just recently, the so-called University of Idlib showed its true colours by banning male and female students from belonging to the same groups on social networks and messaging services used by students to communicate on academic matters. Moreover, Idlib has seen an increase in child marriages and under-age marriages. Nonetheless, those and other egregious facts are being overlooked by women's and children's advocates in the Security Council.

Moreover, we are witnessing consistent attempts by a number of States to paint a picture of Hayat Tahrir Al-Shams as a moderate political force that governs the enclave effectively and impartially, in contrast to the infamous so-called Al-Assad regime. We have not heard a single word from our colleagues in the Security Council. It appears that the status quo suits them, as they do not appear embarrassed by the blatant misappropriation of the United Nations humanitarian assistance, for which their taxpayers are paying tens or hundreds of millions of dollars. It is difficult to see that as anything but criminal hypocrisy.

By suggesting that we should not only keep the Bab Al-Hawa crossing point but also open new ones, our Western colleagues have reached new levels of cynicism.

We will not accept such methods. We believe that it is the duty of all Security Council members to make efforts to restore the territorial integrity of Syria and strengthen its sovereignty, improve its socioeconomic situation and comply with the principles for the provision of humanitarian assistance, which have been complied with everywhere in all humanitarian operations except the one in Syria. Cross-line assistance is not merely a part of the situation, as our American colleagues said today, it is the only legitimate way of delivering humanitarian assistance in any operation.

Over the past year, our opponents have been moving in the opposite direction and are doing everything they can to worsen the problems faced by Syrians in the Government-controlled territories. We need only think of the unlawful unilateral sanctions imposed in circumvention of the Security Council, which place a heavy burden on every citizen of the country. They talk about humanitarian assistance while pretending that the problem of Syria being overwhelmed by sanctions does not exist.

For example, in April and May United Nations agencies were not able to complete a number of planned and approved missions because of a lack of fuel. Why was that the case? That was the result of the sanctions that had been imposed. It took a year for the voices of international non-governmental organizations to be heard and the problem of sanctions to finally be reflected in the reports of the Secretary-General. We call on OCHA to not shy away from that topic and to continue to keep the Security Council informed about this matter.

Separately, I would like to underscore the know-how of our American colleagues — the so-called Caesar Act, without the removal of which any attempts to loosen sanction regimes will be ineffective and will continue to hinder the independent development of Syria.

We have taken note of the attempts by Washington to reduce sanctions pressure. I mean the United States Department of the Treasury's General License 21 of 17 June, which sets forth a broadening of American humanitarian exemptions for Syria in order to simply the delivery of goods and services in the country to fight the pandemic. Only time will tell if that will be effective, because the humanitarian exemptions, which are effective only on paper, already existed. We believe that our colleagues from the European Union

also should think about the ineffective humanitarian exemptions and take the necessary measures.

Our Western colleagues continue to demonstratively ignore the task of rebuilding the country's infrastructure. Today my French colleague said that more than half of the citizens in Syria are experiencing food insecurity. Did he ask why? Is that because of a lack of humanitarian access, or because of the destroyed infrastructure in the country following its destruction by a war against terrorism and because of the sanctions imposed against a sovereign State?

With regard to rebuilding the infrastructure, I understand what he is talking about, my dear friend. Rebuilding infrastructure is a requirement for the return of refugees, and therefore for the relaunching of the economy. That is simple logic, which at the end of the day will lead to a reduced burden on donors. At the same time, sponsoring projects in Idlib, the majority of which are misappropriated by international terrorists, is something that co-sponsors are ready to do. Only such a distorted reality can lead to the creation of the draft document on the cross-border mechanism that our colleagues will clearly present to us soon.

We cannot ignore the man-made environmental catastrophe in the north-east of Syria. The fight against its consequences, much like the efforts on the ground to provide medical assistance to the people, is a long-term priority and requires funding. I would also like to note that we are increasingly concerned about what is happening beyond the Euphrates River and the ongoing attempts aimed at violent demographic engineering. The situation in Al-Hol camp threatens to spiral out of control. According to information we have received, the residents are being actively radicalized. A worrisome picture is also being painted in the Al-Tanf region. I recall once again that the responsibility for what is happening there lies with the occupying Powers.<sup>[P.1]</sup> There is a solution to the serious humanitarian situation in Syria, and it does not lie with the extension of the cross-border mechanism. The argument that humanitarian workers find it easier to work within its framework does not convince us. We are convinced that respecting the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Syria, which we are always defending in words, should be complied with — not only with words but with actions. With regard to the closing of the Al-Yarubiyah crossing, if the will is there, all of those questions can be overcome. Until our colleagues have demonstrated with their words and actions that they are committed to that task,

discussion of extending the transborder mechanism has little meaning. There is still time before the deadline. I hope we will not waste that time.

I would like to pose some questions to our briefers. I hope that they will be able to respond to them at this meeting.

First, I would like to pose some questions to Mr. Rajasingham.

According to United Nations data, every year about \$300 million is provided across the cross-border mechanism. Why is that massive sum suddenly barely enough to provide vital goods and services to people. Why is the situation in Idlib in terms of food insecurity? According to the report of the Secretary-General, the situation of food insecurity is getting worse every month. As we understand it, the amount of deliveries through the World Food Programme is at about 80 per cent. There has been no fighting in Idlib for a long time now. We are hearing from different sources that the so-called local administration supposedly enjoys the respect not only of some donor countries, but also of humanitarian agencies on the ground. There is no new influx of internally displaced persons into this enclave. On the contrary, people are still trying in vain to leave. What is happening with food security there?

Secondly, as an experienced and high-ranking humanitarian worker, could he inform us what needs to be done to unlock cross-line deliveries in Idlib? How can the United Nations organize that process, and what problems are being encountered?

Thirdly, why cannot the United Nations Monitoring Mission be relocated to Government-controlled territory and why cannot humanitarian convoys access Idlib on inter-Syrian routes?

Fourthly, the Al-Qaida Taliban Monitoring Team reported that this area is being used by Hayat Tahrir Al-Shams for money-laundering. Their monthly income across the Bab Al-Hawa is about \$4 million. In addition, they receive a large amount of money as proceeds from all cross-border activities and trade within the enclave itself, which is completely under their control. Obviously, Hayat Tahrir Al-Shams is also actively engaged in United Nations humanitarian operations. I would like to hear his comments on that as well.

I will now pose some questions to Ms. Ibrahim.

How can one guarantee that humanitarian assistance goes to the end-users? How does that happen specifically? Who are her partners on the ground?

Secondly, armed groups in Idlib signed, under the aegis of OCHA, a so-called declaration of commitment of compliance with international humanitarian law and humanitarian assistance. What does she, as a direct beneficiary of that declaration, know about that document, and how has the working situation on the ground changed since it was signed?

Thirdly, in her view, how are cross-line deliveries worse than cross-border mechanisms, given that deliveries from Damascus would be better controlled? What exactly is preventing her non-governmental organization, whose primary goal is just to help people in need, from actively advocating for cross-line deliveries?

**The President:** I shall now make a statement in my capacity as representative of Estonia.

I thank the Secretary-General for his remarks and Acting Under-Secretary Rajasingham for the very detailed overview of the humanitarian situation in Syria. We also appreciate the insightful comments of Ms. Ibrahim.

I extend my gratitude to humanitarian workers on the front lines, who continue to provide aid to millions of people. Their work continues under dangerous circumstances. Estonia condemns the attack on Al-Shifa hospital in the beginning of the month, which killed 19 civilians, including two hospital workers.

Despite some calm, the war is far from over in Syria. The most recent report of the Secretary-General (S/2021/583) points out that in April and May there were 186 different security incidents. At least 150 people were killed, including 36 children.

Serious challenges such as violent clashes and the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic have exacerbated the humanitarian situation. In that light, the Security Council must uphold its responsibilities and support the Syrian people, especially the most vulnerable groups. Safe, sustained and unimpeded humanitarian access remains vital. To address the enormous humanitarian needs, extending and expanding cross-border aid deliveries in July is the only responsible approach.

Estonia calls for the reauthorization of the Bab al-Hawa crossing for one year and to reopen the crossings of Bab al-Salam, in Idlib, and Al-Yarubiyah, in the north-east, for the same period. We give our support to the penholders Ireland and Norway to have an early renewal of the mandate.

A sustainable humanitarian response must be predicated on enabling access to all parts of Syria. We need to ensure the availability of COVID-19 vaccines to everyone in Syria.

At the same time, we acknowledge the importance of cross-line aid. However, those deliveries remain sporadic and limited. As the violence continues in the north-west of Syria, no reliable agreement has been reached between humanitarian organizations and the parties on the ground to bring much-needed help to Idlib over the front lines. Humanitarian access to the north-east also remains limited.

I do not believe that, as we just heard, that everyone is wrong, the Secretary-General is wrong, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs is wrong, aid organizations are wrong, other Member States are wrong, and so on. The European Union (EU), together with its member States, is the largest donor of humanitarian aid to Syria and the region. Restrictive EU measures do not in any way impede the provision of humanitarian assistance in Syria, especially food and medical supplies. Those sanctions target only those who have committed crimes against the Syrian people. Sanctions will remain in place until a genuine political transition is firmly under way in Syria, in line with the relevant Security Council resolutions.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

I give the floor to Mr. Rajasingham to respond to comments made and questions raised.

**Mr. Rajasingham:** I thank you very much, Mr. President, for this opportunity to respond to some of these questions.

The first question is, why is it that with record deliveries in north-west Syria, it is also the place where there is the highest number of starving people? Where has all the aid gone?

There is no systematic diversion of aid in north-west Syria. We know that because the cross-border operations are among the most closely scrutinized

humanitarian operations in the world. The reason that people in north-west Syria continue to suffer is not that aid has been stolen or diverted. It is that there has not been nearly enough aid to meet the massive needs, because they have no other lifeline.

We track cross-border aid deliveries at every step, from when they are dispatched to when they cross the border, to when they arrive at warehouses, to when they reach distribution centres and people in need. Those rigorous monitoring and oversight measures are outlined in the report of the Secretary-General dated 14 May 2020 to the Council reviewing cross-line and cross-border operation (S/2020/401).

The other question is, does cross-border aid go directly to the people who need it most? The fact that aid is being delivered to the places where needs are the highest indicates that assessment and prioritization are working as they should. The United Nations partners reach 2.4 million people on average each month through cross-border operations, yet needs are so great in north-west Syria that more assistance is needed. That is why we are calling for urgent increases in funding and for all channels to reach people in need to be kept available.

With respect to the impact of the Al-Yarubiyah closing, I should like to say a few words about the needs in north-east Syria, previously supported by the Al-Yarubiyah crossing. An estimated 1.8 million people require assistance in areas of north-east Syria outside of the control of the Government. More than 70 per cent of them are considered to be in extreme need, well above the national average. From Damascus most agencies have regular access to north-east Syria for non-health items, in cross-line operations by the Tabaqah crossing to warehouses in Qamishli for onward distribution to people in need. Trucks depart with aid every few days from areas controlled by the Government of Syria. On health items, though, in 2020 the World Health Organization completed six road shipments in north-east Syria in addition to 13 airlifts.

Some medical supplies provided by WHO were delivered to 15 hospitals and 106 primary health-care centres cross-line. However, as the Secretary-General has noted, that represents a modest proportion of total needs, and many facilities remain short of staff, supplies and equipment. Overall, though, there is not enough aid of all sorts reaching north-east Syria.

Humanitarian organizations operating in the north-east reported limited functionality and capacity

of health-care facilities, a lack of adequately trained medical staff and imminent stockouts of medical supplies, including critical medicine such as insulin and cardiovascular and antibacterial medicines.

Humanitarian operations in the north-east were left vulnerable to such supply shortages with the loss of United Nations supply-chain support, when the Security Council's authorization for the United Nations use of the Al-Yarubiyah border crossing expired.

Our non-governmental organization (NGO) colleagues continue to remind us of the challenges that the loss of United Nations access has resulted in. One NGO informed us that it had seen stockouts of as many as 40 per cent of critical medicines in NGO-supported facilities in the north-east. They also reported that at Al-Hol camp, 30 per cent of patients with chronic diseases cannot be covered through the medications available, and similar shortages are reported in other camps.

I think that I have answered the questions that were asked. We were not sure about the third question that was asked, by the Russian representative.

However, there is one last question in terms of Hayat Tahrir Al-Shams using that area for money-laundering and that income at Bab al-Hawa is very high. The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs is not, obviously, in a position to speak about money-laundering, and, as I said, we do know where our aid is going. It is going to the civilians in need. The United Nations tracks its cross-border deliveries at every step, as I mentioned, from where they are dispatched to where they cross the border. So perhaps, I think, with respect to the cross-border operation, the mechanisms that we have put in place and the investments that we have made allow us to be perhaps one of the most rigorously tracked humanitarian operations that we have around the globe.

**The President:** I thank Mr. Rajasingham for the clarifications he provided.

I now give the floor to Ms. Ibrahim to respond to the comments made and questions raised.

**Ms. Ibrahim:** Allow me to address the first question that was posed.

We ensure that there are several modalities in which we check and audit the work that we do to ensure that beneficiaries receive the aid that they deserve. Much of

this relies heavily on information that we triangulate in vetting all our due-diligence and managing processes. We also do a lot of remote management, including the use of technology and third-party monitoring. We have the support capacity of our local partners, which are the best and most reassuring of monitors in terms of both delivery and the oversight of the delivery process.

Last but not least, as an international development organization, we adhere to and promote the humanitarian safeguards to ensure that those whom we serve receive the service that we have committed to providing to them. There are vetting and due-diligence processes and monitoring mechanisms in place, and we are governed by the core humanitarian principles that all aid actors follow. We are therefore quite confident that when — and it does happen — there are questions about the inability to reach those who are eligible for aid, those questions are always escalated to our donors and our supporters, and we undertake the appropriate investigations to ensure that there is no diversion of the aid.

I am sorry; I think I missed the second question. But I will try to answer the third question posed. As I understood it, the question was: How do we at CARE know that cross-border is better than cross-line? If I understood the question correctly, we do not know. CARE does not have an operating presence in Syria.

**The President:** There are some technical issues with the video-teleconference connection to Ms. Ibrahim.

The representative of the Russian Federation has asked for the floor to make a further statement.

**Mr. Nebenzia** (Russian Federation): While we are waiting, I will perhaps repeat the questions that Mr. Rajasingham missed. The second and third questions were: In his opinion, what is needed to unblock cross-line deliveries to Idlib, and how should that process be done so that such aid is delivered cross-line? Where are the problems? Why could the United Nations monitoring mission not be located in Government territory to monitor the convoys that are going to Idlib?

**The President:** I now give the floor to Mr. Rajasingham to respond to the questions raised.

**Mr. Rajasingham:** I thank the Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation for clarifying those questions.

At this point, we are registered across the region. However, the mission cannot proceed without the agreement of all the relevant parties. As is known, security is the key issue for the delivery and distribution of humanitarian assistance. We have been working very hard to secure such an agreement for over a year. A revised concept of operations has been discussed with the parties, and we hope that they will reach an agreement on all the operational details of the first mission.

However, even if the cross-line convoy does proceed and they can be deployed regularly, at this point the mechanism is not large enough in scale and scope to replace the cross-border operation. What we would like to do, as we do in all other humanitarian operations, is to be able to operate in an impartial, neutral and independent manner. If we can have the freedom to do so from all the parties involved, both on the Syrian Government side and on the north-western Syria side, I think that we will then be able to do it. But, at this point, we need first to get it off the ground, and at the same time at this point it cannot replace the cross-border operation in terms of scale and scope.

**The President:** I thank Mr. Rajasingham for the clarifications he has provided.

I again give the floor to Ms. Ibrahim to continue responding to the questions raised.

**Ms. Ibrahim:** I ask that the Council please accept my apologies; I got disconnected. I hope that I was able to give an adequate response to the first question. I will attempt the third question, which, as I understand it, is about comparing cross-border and cross-line deliveries.

CARE does not operate out of Syria; our operations are primarily cross-border from Turkey. As such, I do not have a comparative analysis of which modality is better. As I heard today, and as CARE's position, we maintain that all access points at the current time need to be opened and should be allowed to operate so that we can meet the extensive humanitarian needs across all Syria.

Once again, we do not have a direct operation. We do not have a statement on whether or not one is better than the other, but we know that the extensive needs require all border crossings and all options to be on the table.

Again, I would like a clarification regarding the second question that was posed, because I did not fully capture it. If that is possible, I would appreciate it.

**The President:** I thank Ms. Ibrahim for the clarifications she provided.

The representative of the Russian Federation has asked for the floor to make a further statement.

**Mr. Nebenzia** (Russian Federation): I will perhaps forfeit the second question, but I will give a small clarification of the first one. The question was also how CARE's assistance technically moves into Idlib and who its partners are on the ground there in Idlib where it delivers its assistance.

**The President:** I now give the floor to Ms. Ibrahim to respond to the question raised.

**Ms. Ibrahim:** Like several other international organizations operating in the north-west, we have a diversity of partnerships. I would not want to mention all of them right now. We are obviously focused on partners that can provide a multiplicity of services across the multiplicity of sectors and across multiple geographies. They have grown in strength. They operate by having community acceptance and the infrastructure, the staff and the capacity to receive the aid that we provide to them through funding for aid and humanitarian supplies, which either they purchase from inside Syria or we have transferred across the border from Turkey. As such, many of those organizations have the capacity and the infrastructure required to withstand a significant amount of funding provided by us. We therefore rely on them for the delivery of aid and the monitoring, reporting and building of community acceptance around all that we do in support of Syrian internally displaced persons inside Syria.

**The President:** I thank Ms. Ibrahim for those clarifications.

Before we move forward, even though we heard that it is only a recommendation — and that is true — I would still like to remind speakers of paragraph 22 of note S/2017/507 by the President of the Security Council, which encourages all participants in Council meetings to deliver their statements in five minutes or less.

I now give the floor to the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic.

**Mr. Sabbagh** (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): After listening to the statements of certain

States today, it has become apparent that they still persist in exploiting the Security Council and using it as a platform to politicize the humanitarian work being conducted in my country, practise political hypocrisy and promote a misleading approach to divert our discussion from its main topic so as to serve their goal of prolonging the humanitarian crisis in Syria.

Today we are once again witnessing the insistence of those Western countries on claiming that extending and strengthening the so-called cross-border mechanism for the delivery of aid will ensure the improvement of the humanitarian situation in Syria. That is a very short-sighted and highly selective view that discriminates against Syrians and obscures the facts and the main reasons for the deterioration of the humanitarian situation in Syria, in particular the crimes of occupation, aggression and terrorism, including economic terrorism manifested in the unilateral coercive measures.

In that context, my delegation reaffirms its principled position of rejecting that politicized mechanism. It was an exceptional temporary measure. The reasons and conditions that led to its adoption no longer exist. My delegation stresses that the practical implementation of the mechanism has proven what Syria had been warning about, namely, the serious violations the have dominated its work. It violates Syrian sovereignty and serves the interests of the Turkish occupation and terrorist organizations loyal to it, notably the Hayat Tahrir Al-Shams/Al-Nusra Front, which controls Idlib and its surroundings.

In addition, there are major flaws committed by this mechanism, such as not coordinating with the Syrian Government, the lack of transparency of its supervision procedures and measures and the final destination of the aid, most of which ends up in the hands of terrorist organizations that control the Bab Al-Hawa crossing and is then used, as has been stated time and again, to finance criminal activities, win loyalties and recruit new terrorists.

The question here for those who defend the extension of the work of the mechanism is: how do they justify allowing the use of a crossing that is controlled by an organization designated as a terrorist organization by the Council — Hayat Tahrir Al-Shams — to deliver aid across the border?

The representatives of Western countries claim that they are concerned about the humanitarian situation of the Syrian people. That contradicts the unilateral,



coercive and destructive measures imposed by their countries, which have led to humanitarian suffering as a result of acute shortages of food, medication, medical supplies, water and basic services. In addition, those measures have affected the delivery of humanitarian and relief assistance. Their purported concerns contradict their policies, which aim to cover up the crimes of the terrorist organizations and secessionist militias they sponsor. They remain silent about the practices of United States occupation forces in the north-east and the Al-Tanf area and their looting and stealing of the resources of the Syrian people and of their oil, agricultural crops and cultural artefacts.

What is most outrageous is that the Secretary-General's report (S/2021/583) praises the Turkish side, while the practices of the Turkish regime have been one of the most serious and dangerous causes of the crisis in Syria. Turkish forces are occupying Syrian territory in the north and north-west. They are committing crimes against humanity against the Syrian people, including by using water as a weapon of war against civilians. The Turkish regime continues to deprive more than 1 million citizens in Al-Hasakah governorate and its surroundings of drinking water by cutting off water supply for the twenty-fourth time from the Allouk water station.

The Turkish regime is also violating bilateral agreements between the two countries and international relevant treaties by reducing the flow of the Euphrates River. That has severely affected water reserves and drinking and irrigation water supplies in Syria. It has also resulted in the cutting off of the electricity supply to the north and the east as hydroelectric power generation through the Tishrin and Tabaqah dams has been halted.

The crimes of the Turkish occupation and its proxy terrorist groups have gone so far as to prevent more than 2,600 students from Idlib governorate from travelling to Hama governorate to sit primary and secondary education examinations. They confiscated the students' bags, identification cards and personal belongings and attacked the bus drivers who were supposed to transport the students. Our request to the Secretariat has not succeeded in dissuading the Turkish regime from its position, which threatens the future of Syrian children by preventing them from pursuing their education.

My Government calls on the Security Council to intervene immediately and decisively stop the crimes of the Turkish regime, which are exacerbating the humanitarian suffering of millions of Syrians. The Council must ensure that the Allouk water station is not used for political purposes and is operated by employees of the Al-Hasakah Drinking Water Corporation. The existing irregularities affecting electricity lines that feed water stations must be removed, and the water flow of the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers must be ensured.

The report claims that the extension of the cross-border mechanism will contribute to making coronavirus disease (COVID-19) vaccines available. That is incorrect. The report acknowledges that the vaccines made available to Syrians in Government-controlled areas to date have only covered 0.5 per cent of the population. At the same time, we find it surprising that the report fails to mention that secessionist militias in the north-east, acting as a proxy for United States forces, recently obstructed a COVID-19 vaccination campaign undertaken by Ministry of Health teams in Deir ez-Zor governorate. They prevented those mobile teams from entering camps in Al-Hasakah governorate. They spread false rumours about the safety of vaccines and, as a result, people have become less willing to get vaccinated, and that has affected our ability to reach the desired objective.

The humanitarian situation in Syria cannot be improved through empty words and pretence but will require the following.

First, it will require supporting the efforts of the Syrian Government to combat terrorism and eradicate the threat of the terrorist groups Da'esh, the Al-Nusra Front and associated entities.

Secondly, it will require putting an end to the illegal foreign military presence of the United States and Turkey on the territory of the Syrian Arab Republic and their hostile practices and looting of national resources.

Thirdly, it will require the immediate lifting of the unilateral coercive measures imposed on the Syrian people.

Fourthly, it will require putting an end to the politicization of humanitarian action and refraining from linking humanitarian action to conditions, loyalties and dictates that run counter to the principles of humanitarian action.

Fifthly, it will require supporting the efforts of Syrian State institutions to alleviate suffering and provide support and services to the Syrian people, including by supporting development goals and rehabilitating damaged infrastructure to ensure the safe, dignified and voluntary return of refugees and displaced persons.

The key and most effective United Nations humanitarian relief operations in Syria have been mounted from within Syrian territory, in coordination and cooperation with the Syrian Government and humanitarian partners. That mechanism is the most viable, is in the fullest compliance with international law and is the most respectful of the sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity of the Syrian Arab Republic, as provided for in all United Nations resolutions on the situation in Syria. Those who question that mechanism are seeking to promote their ways of delivering aid across our borders.

In conclusion, my country renews its commitment to doing its utmost to improve the humanitarian situation of the Syrian people and alleviating their suffering, which has resulted from the defective policies and hostile practices of some countries. We stress that we will continue to facilitate the work of the United Nations and our humanitarian partners to ensure the timely delivery of assistance to those who are really in need. We also stress that the Syrian Government is committed to ensuring the safety and security of humanitarian convoys and workers.

**The President:** I now give the floor to the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

**Ms. Ershadi** (Islamic Republic of Iran): For well over 10 years, the Syrian people have been suffering gravely from the conflict, and in recent years the economy has deteriorated further, mostly due to unilateral sanctions, which also negatively impact the delivery of humanitarian aid to people in need. As a country that has been subjected to unjust unilateral sanctions for decades, Iran condemns weaponizing food and medicine through sanctions, as they are irresponsible, immoral and unlawful, and, in the context of Syria, only prolong the suffering of people, delay the return of refugees and displaced persons, and hamper reconstruction efforts. The complete removal of unilateral sanctions must therefore be a substantive element of any discussion on the humanitarian aspects of the Syrian conflict.

While under the current circumstances the delivery of humanitarian assistance to Syria is essential, it must nevertheless be based on the principle of full respect for the sovereignty, territorial integrity and national unity of Syria, which has been reaffirmed by the Council in all its resolutions. We also recall other guiding principles of humanitarian assistance reaffirmed by numerous resolutions of the General Assembly, according to which humanitarian assistance should be provided with the consent of the affected country and delivered, in principle, on the basis of an appeal by the affected country. Likewise, according to such principles, the affected State has the primary role in the initiation, organization, coordination and implementation of humanitarian assistance within its territory.

Taking into account such guiding principles, we share the view that the cross-border aid-delivery mechanism has been an exceptional temporary measure imposed by certain circumstances that no longer exist, and, accordingly, the aid to people in need must now be delivered in cooperation and coordination with the Syrian Government and from within the Syrian territory, which can ensure, inter alia, that aid is not delivered to terrorist groups. The full cooperation of the Syrian Government with the United Nations and numerous humanitarian organizations active in cross-line aid delivery in Syria proves that this is approach is reliable and in line with international law.

We once again call for the depoliticization of the Syrian humanitarian file in the Security Council. The international community must focus on those humanitarian measures in Syria that can actually and quickly alleviate the suffering of people in need, provide conditions for the earliest return of refugees and displaced persons, and contribute to the long-term stability of the country.

Reiterating our commitment to the peaceful resolution of the Syrian crisis and the restoration of the unity and territorial integrity of Syria, we call for an end to the occupation of parts of its territory, withdrawal of all uninvited foreign forces from the country, cessation of support for any separatist tendency or illegitimate self-rule initiatives, and prevention of the violation of Syrian sovereignty, particularly by acts of aggression by the Israeli regime, which Iran strongly condemns. We will continue our efforts aimed at assisting the people and the Government of Syria to overcome the enormous challenges they face.

**The President:** I now give the floor to the representative of Turkey.

**Mr. Sinirlioğlu (Turkey):** I thank the Secretary-General for his remarks. I also thank Acting Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, Ramesh Rajasingham, and Ms. Sherine Ibrahim of CARE for their briefings. We must heed their warnings that failing to extend the United Nations cross-border humanitarian mechanism in Syria will be most harmful.

I also acknowledge the concern of the majority of Council members, who have recognized the critical need for the continuation of lifeline aid operations to alleviate the dire humanitarian situation in Syria. Let us not forget the conditions that led the Security Council to authorize the United Nations cross-border humanitarian operations in 2014. The Al-Assad regime was ruthlessly killing its own people and deliberately targeting critical humanitarian infrastructure. Syrians fled their homeland at a rate of 8,000 to 14,000 per day. In response, the Security Council established a cross-border mechanism to ensure safe and sustained humanitarian access to the internally displaced people within Syria (resolution 2165 (2014)). The United Nations has assumed the leading role in providing aid to the most vulnerable Syrians through the most direct routes in the most rapid way.

Al-Assad and his forces committed a series of war crimes and crimes against humanity, and, in the subsequent years, these criminals have only become more present and more shameless. The destructive war Al-Assad has waged against his own people has become increasingly brutal. Today, millions of vulnerable people in north-west Syria are still faced with collective punishment. They are struggling to survive in an active war zone. Their only hope for survival is aid delivered by the United Nations.

With half of its population displaced, the entire country is in ruins. The Al-Assad regime, the terrorist organization Kurdistan Workers' Party/ People's Protection Units (PKK/YPG) and its Syrian offshoot, the so-called Syrian Democratic Forces, continue their systematic violations against civilians. In March, the Al-Assad regime attacked the Al-Atareb hospital. Just last week the Al-Shifa hospital in Afrin was targeted by PKK/YPG terrorists. To put this into context, Al-Atareb and Al-Shifa hospitals were among the largest health-care facilities in the region, and their

coordinates had been shared with relevant parties within the United Nations de-confliction mechanism. We strongly condemn these attacks and remind members of the Security Council that the Council is entrusted with the obligation to investigate these grave violations of international humanitarian law and hold perpetrators accountable.

With regard to the humanitarian implications of the low water level in the Euphrates River, let me be clear: we attach great importance to needs on the ground, and we keep raising challenges to the water and electricity disruptions by the regime in Al-Bab and by the terrorist organization PKK/YPG in Allouk. Like other countries in the region, we may be witnessing the adverse impacts of climate change on our water resources. As of May 2021, Keban dam, the upstream dam on the Euphrates River, which stands between our borders, has seen the second lowest dam lake level since the completion of its filling. However, despite this alarming hydrological and climatic reality, the average amount of water we released from the Euphrates downstream in the first half of the year has been over 500 cubic metres per second, which is our contractual obligation. We expect the United Nations to support downstream countries in addressing water challenges with better water management and agricultural practices.

Stopping the cross-border mechanism would simply permit the Syrian regime and terrorist organizations to increase their campaign of murder to an even greater scale. An immediate halt in the delivery of United Nations food assistance, critical medical supplies and other life-saving assistance would threaten the lives of the 4 million people who rely on us to keep them alive. Furthermore, without the cross-border mechanism, Syrians will not receive their vaccinations against the coronavirus disease. Without this mechanism, United Nations agencies will no longer have a mandate to assist non-governmental organizations on the ground and financially.

Tell me, Mr. President, are you willing to allow the United Nations, as the largest actor in the humanitarian response in Syria, to disappear on your watch? There is no country or entity that has the capacity to emulate such a sophisticated system to monitor aid delivery. Those who consistently fabricate aid-diversion lies and advocate General Assembly resolution 46/182 must understand this point. In the absence of the mechanism, humanitarian operations will become less transparent, less accountable and less effective. They will therefore

be in contradiction with that very same resolution. Please also keep in mind that the absence of the cross-border mechanism will undermine the prospects for a political solution, for it will not be possible to fully implement resolution 2254 (2015).

Again today we heard from those who are promoting cross-line access only. I would remind you, Mr. President, that one of the reasons the Council adopted resolution 2165 (2014) was the Syrian regime's constant obstruction of the delivery of critical humanitarian supplies in many parts of the country. Reporting by the United Nations and several non-governmental organizations has detailed the conditions and highly restricted humanitarian space following the closure of the Al Yarubiyah crossing point in the north-east, an area that is supposed to be reached through cross-line access.

Let me set the record straight once again: cross-line assistance can in no way replace cross-border operations, even if we are ready to be helpful in

ensuring its application. That is a complementary modality — nothing more. There is no alternative to the cross-border modality, particularly in the north-west.

The Council must heed the Secretary-General's advice and the joint appeal made by the Heads of United Nations agencies last week. I also refer the membership to the joint letter from a cross-regional group of countries addressed to the President of the Security Council yesterday. The world is watching. I urge the members of the Council to do what is right and preserve this indispensable mechanism for at least another 12 months, with additional crossing points.

With regard to the hallucinatory statement made by the representative of the Syrian regime, I will repeat once again that I do not consider him to be my legitimate counterpart. His presence here is an affront to the millions of Syrians who have suffered countless crimes at the hands of the regime. I will therefore not dignify his delusional accusations with a response.

*The meeting rose at 5.40 p.m.*