



Security Council

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Letter dated 21 May 2020 from the President of the Security Council addressed to the Secretary-General and the Permanent Representatives of the members of the Security Council

I have the honour to enclose herewith copies of the briefing provided by Mr. Mark Lowcock, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, as well as the statements delivered by the representatives of China, the Dominican Republic, Estonia, France, the Niger, the Russian Federation, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, South Africa, Tunisia, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and Viet Nam, in connection with the video-teleconference on the Middle East (Syria) convened on Tuesday, 19 May 2020. Statements were also delivered by the representatives of the Syrian Arab Republic and Turkey.

In accordance with the procedure set out in the letter dated 7 May 2020 from the President of the Security Council addressed to the Permanent Representatives of the members of the Security Council (S/2020/372), which was agreed in the light of the extraordinary circumstances caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, these briefing and statements will be issued as an official document of the Security Council.

(Signed) **Sven Jürgenson**
President of the Security Council



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

I will focus my briefing today on two areas: first, the impact of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) in Syria and the preparedness and response measures under way; and, secondly, the humanitarian response across Syria and the findings of the Secretary-General's review of United Nations humanitarian cross-line and cross-border operations (S/2020/401), which was circulated last week.

Let me start with the latest update on COVID-19 cases. To date, the Syrian authorities have confirmed 58 cases in the country, including three fatalities. Another six cases have been recorded in the north-east, including one fatality. No cases have been confirmed in the north-west.

Building up the limited laboratory and case investigation capacities remains a major priority, and the United Nations is reinforcing this effort across Syria. That includes considerable support from the World Health Organization (WHO) for the progressive expansion of testing capacities in Damascus, Aleppo, Latakia and Homs — from conducting repairs to providing essential equipment, reagents and on-site training of laboratory technicians.

Testing capacity is not yet sufficiently established for epidemiological evidence across the country, including in the north-east, where further efforts are under way with support from national and international partners. The United Nations, including the World Health Organization, stands ready to further support the expansion of testing capacities across Syria in accordance with the epidemiological situation and needs.

Support is also under way for infection prevention and control — from risk communication and community engagement to isolation centres. Some \$23 million has already been allocated from the Syria Humanitarian Fund, administered by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, to support COVID-19 preventative measures. I thank the donors whose contributions have paid for that.

However, there remain significant shortages of personal protective equipment and other medical items across the country. Let me echo what Geir Pedersen said to the Council yesterday (see S/2020/420), further to the Secretary-General's global call for the waiver of sanctions that can undermine the capacity of countries to ensure access to food, essential health supplies and medical support to respond to the pandemic. Like Geir, I note the public assurances by relevant States that their sanctions programmes relating to Syria neither ban the flow of humanitarian supplies nor target medicine and medical devices. I welcome their commitments to fully and expeditiously apply humanitarian exemptions. I continue to follow this issue closely.

As in many other countries, we are seeing the economic impact of the pandemic before we see infections peak. After an initial jump at the end of March, the average price of the national reference food basket for April is 15 per cent higher than the March average, and more than double the average recorded in April 2019. It is now higher than at any time since the crisis began.

In the north-west, which relies heavily on imported goods, the Syrian pound continues to lose value against the United States dollar. Local sources report that, as of this morning, the exchange rate in some parts of Idlib has fallen as low as 1,950 Syrian pounds to the dollar. That is a depreciation of 54 per cent since the end of April. The cost of a dollar has more than trebled in the past 12 months; the rate was 570 Syrian pounds to the dollar in May 2019. The consequences of this for the purchasing power of local communities are severe.

In early 2020, before the economic impacts of COVID-19 were felt in Syria, an estimated 80 per cent of people already lived below the poverty line. The added impact of the pandemic is now driving food insecurity to record levels. The World Food Programme announced last week that an estimated 9.3 million people in Syria are now food insecure, up from an estimated 7.9 million people six months ago.

The High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet, warned this month that killings of civilians across Syria are increasing, and various parties to the conflict, including the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant, appear to view the COVID-19 pandemic as an opportunity to regroup and inflict violence on the population.

I now turn to humanitarian operations in the north-west, where aid deliveries continue at record levels.

In April, 1,365 trucks crossed from Turkey into the north-west through the Security Council-authorized border crossings at Bab Al-Salam and Bab Al-Hawa. This is an increase of more than 130 per cent on April 2019. There are three main reasons for the scale-up. The first reason is the rapid deterioration of the humanitarian situation since December, which continues to demand increased levels of assistance. The second is the need to prepare for the impact of COVID-19. As I have said before, the north-west is considered at extremely high risk of an outbreak. The third pressure stems from the uncertainty under which we are operating.

The authorization of cross-border assistance under resolution 2504 (2020) represents the sole channel for the United Nations to deliver life-saving assistance to millions of people in north-west Syria. It is up for renewal in less than two months. Members have received the Secretary-General's review of cross-line and cross-border operations. In paragraph 1, the Secretary-General highlights that he has submitted the review ahead of schedule to allow the Council to take a timely decision and avoid the disruption of aid. The findings of the review are clear — meeting the enormous humanitarian needs in the north-west requires a renewal of the cross-border authorization for the Bab Al-Salam and Bab Al-Hawa border crossings for an additional 12 months. The United Nations Monitoring Mechanism should be extended for the same period.

That decision cannot be left to the last minute. Too many lives are at stake. Sustaining pipelines in this massive operation requires weeks, and often months, of lead time. An environment of uncertainty risks the continuity of aid. It undermines the ability of humanitarian organizations to save lives.

In the meantime, our colleagues involved in the operation, from the loading staff and the drivers to the United Nations coordinators and monitors, are relentlessly at the border every working day during Ramadan, amid the challenges posed by the pandemic, to scale up deliveries.

I now turn to the north-east and the ongoing efforts to increase cross-line deliveries of medical supplies following the removal of Al-Yarubiyah as an authorized border crossing.

I am pleased to report that on 10 May, the World Health Organization was able to deliver a 30-ton consignment of medical supplies to Qamishli by road. A second consignment of 23 tons is expected to arrive in the coming days. That is the first overland delivery of WHO supplies to the north-east in two years. WHO is committed to responding to the humanitarian needs of all Syrians in the north-east by the most direct routes, particularly in order to reach the most vulnerable.

While this overland delivery is a very welcome step, let me be clear that much more needs to be done to bridge the gap in medical assistance for the north-east. At

present, the medical supplies delivered cross-line to north-east Syria are reaching 31 per cent of the facilities that previously depended on the Al-Yarubiyah border crossing for those supplies.

The findings of the Secretary-General's review of cross-line and cross-border operations are also clear with regard to the north-east. A combination of more cross-border and cross-line access is required to sustain, and preferably increase, humanitarian assistance. In the Secretary-General's report (S/2020/139) released in February, several cross-border options were identified as alternatives to Al-Yarubiyah. His report also described their limitations in comparison to Al-Yarubiyah.

Also in the north-east, the provision of water from the Allouk station has again been interrupted and reduced many times since my last briefing (see S/2020/354), creating severe disruptions in the water supply, especially in Al-Hasakah city and internally displaced persons camps in the area. At least half a million people are affected.

To compensate, humanitarian agencies have scaled up emergency water trucking, but this is neither a sufficient nor a sustainable solution. Access to water in all areas is all the more critical during this COVID-19 pandemic. Across Syria, relevant parties need to ensure the provision of basic services to civilians.

I have briefed the Council on the ongoing COVID-19 response across Syria, as well as the assistance being channelled through the cross-border operation. Let me also highlight the broader response operation under way from within Syria in areas under the Government's control, where the United Nations and its partner organizations reach most of those we assist. In the first quarter of 2020, the humanitarian operation delivered food assistance for 3.3 million people; 3.3 million medical procedures; more than 2 million medical treatment courses; life-saving water, sanitation and hygiene assistance for 1.2 million people; education for 1.3 million people; and nutrition support for almost half a million people.

In conclusion, I will reiterate my key ask to the Council today. The cross-border operation for north-west Syria, authorized by the Security Council, is a lifeline for millions of civilians whom the United Nations cannot reach by other means. It cannot be substituted. Its authorization must be renewed. An early decision by the Council will avoid the disruption of that vital operation and help humanitarian organizations to continue the scale-up that the current needs and the prospect of COVID-19 demand. A delay will increase suffering and cost lives.

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

I thank Under-Secretary-General Lowcock for his briefing. We have also studied very carefully the report of the Secretary-General on cross-line and cross-border operations in Syria (S/2020/401). We welcome the presence of colleagues from Syria and from Turkey to participate in this meeting.

China is paying close attention to the humanitarian situation in Syria. We are worried that the humanitarian situation could be further exacerbated by the impact of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19). We welcome the ceasefire appeals made by the Secretary-General and his Special Envoy, and we call on all parties to enhance mutual trust and jointly safeguard the well-being of the Syrian people.

As we have stated repeatedly, the Syrian Government bears the primary responsibility for improving the humanitarian situation in Syria, including preventing and containing the spread of COVID-19. Its role cannot be replaced. The Syrian Government has taken responsive measures to raise public awareness of the virus and reduce the risk of community transmission. Those efforts should be acknowledged. We encourage the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, other United Nations agencies and the international community to help strengthen Syria's capacity to respond to the pandemic. China has provided medical assistance to Syria to combat COVID-19, and we will continue to do so.

Concerning cross-line humanitarian assistance, we are pleased to see improvement in the scale of such operations. The Syrian Government has maintained close contact with the United Nations in conducting cross-line operations as well as assessment missions. We encourage further cooperation and coordination in that regard. The relevant parties should enhance political dialogue and remove all obstacles that hinder cross-line humanitarian access to the north-west and north-east of Syria.

With regard to cross-border humanitarian assistance, our position has been clear and consistent. We agree that all forms of humanitarian operations should be modified to meet the new challenges posed by the pandemic and take into full account the needs of the Syrian people. Meanwhile, we should remember that the cross-border mechanism was established as a contingency or temporary measure. The sovereignty and territorial integrity of Syria must be respected under any circumstance.

It is also our view that the humanitarian issue in Syria should be dealt with in an integrated and impartial way. We call on all parties to continue to engage in a Syrian-led, Syrian-owned political process, in line with resolution 2254 (2015). Civilians and their livelihoods must be protected. In that connection, we reiterate the urgency of the immediate lifting of unilateral sanctions, which not only hinder medical supplies, but also undermine a country's capacity to mobilize resources, develop its economy and improve people's livelihoods. There is no way to justify unilateral sanctions. We call for more analysis on the humanitarian implications of sanctions in future reports on the Syrian humanitarian issue.

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

We thank Under-Secretary-General Mark Lowcock for his briefing and, through him, express our gratitude to the team that supported the Secretary-General in providing the Council with the review of United Nations humanitarian cross-line and cross-border operations (S/2020/401) in the Syrian Arab Republic. The Dominican Republic appreciates the level of detail provided in the review, complemented by the Under-Secretary-General's views today.

As we read through the report, we had one main question. How can we alleviate the current and potential suffering of the people living in the north-west and north-east of Syria, trapped in the uncertainties of a pandemic and the escalation of violence at any moment?

In such a context, we agree that an all-modalities approach is the only way to meet the growing needs of Syrians who are facing the dire consequences of a long conflict, an economic crisis, food insecurity and now a potential public health crisis for which they are not prepared. Conflict has been the trigger for all those calamities. Therefore, as long as there is conflict, but, above all, as long as there are humanitarian needs, we must provide the conditions for the international community to address those needs in the most direct and effective way.

Protecting the dignity of those affected must be at the heart of any humanitarian operation in Syria. That requires much more from within Syria. It requires for the Syrian authorities to strengthen their capacity to work in coordination with the United Nations and humanitarian organizations on the ground; to provide, without delay, the much-needed humanitarian assistance to Syrians, whoever and wherever they are, in a timely and principled way.

It also requires effective preparation for possible coronavirus disease outbreak in the north-east, where we have seen a gap in the provision of medical assistance due to the closure of the Al-Yarubiyah border-crossing point and given the difficulties with cross-line access from within Syria. We believe that the report of the Secretary-General is very clear in highlighting this gap. Now, to address it, the Security Council will need to take appropriate action, in a constructive and unpoliticized way.

The position of the Dominican Republic is clear, and we stand ready to work with all Council members to respond to these pressing challenges through an all-modalities approach.

In that regard, we recognize the efforts to upscale the cross-border assistance to the north-west, which has, once again, proven to be life-saving for millions of civilians. The Dominican Republic believes that this operation merits our full support, and it must be improved with the aim of serving the affected population even better.

To conclude, we reiterate our call for a sustainable, lasting ceasefire across the entire Syrian Arab Republic to, first, facilitate humanitarian assistance to all those in need and, secondly, to enable the only solution to this conflict — a political solution based on the legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people and facilitated by the United Nations.

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

We greatly appreciate the efforts of humanitarian workers on the front lines in Syria. We also strongly support Secretary-General's call for a global ceasefire amid the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic.

We thank Mr. Lowcock for his briefing. It is encouraging to hear that the ceasefire agreement in the north-east of Syria is holding. Estonia supports efforts of Turkey and Russia to sustain this peace and find a permanent settlement.

Looking at cross-border and cross-line humanitarian aid, we want to stress main conclusion of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA): that these are complimentary mechanisms. In order to reach all Syrians, the Security Council needs to maintain both of these mechanisms.

We can see how delicate the balance is by looking at what happened in the north-east after the closure of Al-Yarubiyah in January. There is now an acute shortage of aid in multiple locations. According to OCHA, the urgency of the situation grows, as humanitarian aid only reaches one third of facilities previously supported through the cross-border mechanism. We must seriously consider the reopening of Al-Yarubiyah to get to help all those in need.

Estonia calls on Security Council members to support the efforts of the humanitarian co-penholders, Belgium and Germany, in renewing cross-border aid in July. That is even more important now, as Syria faces the spread of COVID-19.

Finally, as other members of the European Union (EU) have already explained, the EU sanctions do not hinder humanitarian aid or the response to the virus. Life-saving equipment and medical items will always freely reach Syria. EU members also remain the largest humanitarian donors to Syrians across the whole region.

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

[Original: English and French]

At the outset, I express my warm thanks to Mark Lowcock for his presentation.

The spread of the coronavirus disease in Syria is extremely worrisome. The pandemic is becoming a multiplier of humanitarian needs in a country where more than 11 million people rely on humanitarian assistance.

An immediate and sustainable nationwide ceasefire is more than necessary — there is no alternative to fight the pandemic effectively. This is all the more crucial as the ceasefire in the north-west remains fragile.

Unfortunately, the regime has not responded to the appeal by the Secretary-General and his Special Envoy for a nationwide ceasefire. We call on all parties, and especially the regime, to work actively in that direction.

The United Nations must remain at the forefront of these efforts, in accordance with resolution 2254 (2015).

I would like to reiterate the obligation on all parties to respect international humanitarian law. The protection of civilians should be at the core of every party's concerns. All parties, in particular the Syrian regime, must ensure humanitarian access.

It is crucial to overcome the shortage of essential supplies and equipment to prevent and respond to the spread of the pandemic. They need to be shipped by the most direct routes to reach their intended beneficiaries, the most vulnerable.

It can never be repeated it enough: the cross-border mechanism has never been so relevant, in the north-west and the north-east alike. France remains determined to preserve that life-saving mechanism. Its extension for 12 months, as required by the Secretary-General, is essential.

In the north-west, the scaling up of the humanitarian delivery through the two crossing points must absolutely continue. The risks are immense, both locally and for the region.

In the north-east, gaps in medical supplies have widened as a result of the loss of the Al-Yarubiyah crossing point. The delivery of a World Health Organization convoy last week is a positive step but should not fool us: Damascus is not providing the United Nations with the sufficient and timely authorizations needed to compensate for the loss of Al-Yarubiyah. The figures speak for themselves: only 31 per cent of health facilities previously supported through cross-border assistance are receiving aid. As highlighted in the Secretary-General's report (S/2020/401), the cross-line modality is clearly not sufficient on its own to meet current needs in the north-east. Indeed, cross-line coverage is largely similar to that recorded in 2019. This means there has been no improvement in cross-line since 10 January. This is all the more worrisome as the pandemic is spreading in the north-east. North-east Syria needs cross-border assistance through a dedicated crossing point.

We support all efforts to prevent and punish human rights violations. Mass atrocity crimes will not go unpunished. France will continue to strongly support all efforts to collect and preserve evidence to support proceedings before competent jurisdictions.

We reaffirm the importance of sharing the full report of the Board of Inquiry with the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism and the Commission of Inquiry to further investigate incidents and bring their perpetrators to justice.

Lastly, as indicated yesterday (see S/2020/420), only a political solution in line with resolution 2254 (2015) will bring an end to the humanitarian tragedy in Syria.

Annex VI

Statement by the Permanent Representative of the Niger to the United Nations, Abdou Abarry

I thank Under-Secretary-General Mark Lowcock for his briefing.

Niger salutes the daily efforts of humanitarian agencies to help people in need throughout Syria, especially during the current pandemic.

My delegation would like to reaffirm its support for the cross-border mechanism for the delivery of humanitarian assistance in Syria. We welcome the Secretary-General's report (S/2020/401), on the review of United Nations humanitarian cross-line and cross-border operations in Syria.

The Niger commends the cooperation between the Syrian authorities and the World Health Organization and national organizations in their efforts to prevent and fight against the spread of coronavirus disease (COVID-19). Considering the fact that even countries with better health care are struggling against COVID-19, we remain concerned about the capacity of the Syrian health infrastructure, degraded by years of conflicts, to adequately cope with the situation.

Similarly, a large number of vulnerable people, including internally displaced persons and refugees, primarily women and children, are at high risk of contracting the virus. That would create a larger crisis, given that social distancing is near impossible in overcrowded camps.

The Niger calls on the Syrian Government and humanitarian agencies to work out additional partnership initiatives to protect Syrians in all parts of the country. We also call on all the stakeholders to fully comply with the calls of Secretary-General and his Special Envoy for a complete and immediate nationwide ceasefire in Syria and beyond to enable an all-out effort against the COVID-19 pandemic.

We regret that the full capacity of the cross-border operation in north-east Syria could not be realized. According to the estimates of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, only 30 per cent of prior humanitarian access has been sustained since the border closure. This has resulted in aid not being delivered at its optimum level. Therefore, improvements and enhancements need to be made. The alternative modalities that the United Nations chose still require sustained cross-border and cross-line access. Moreover, COVID-19-related restrictions make the situation more acute.

Furthermore, we call on the donor community to respond favourably to the many appeals of the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs concerning the need for increased assistance to the millions of Syrians in need.

Therefore, the Niger reiterates its support for resolution 2165 (2014) and calls for the opening of the Al-Yarubiyah border crossing on humanitarian grounds. The border crossing is necessary for United Nations agencies to provide aid and medical support to the millions of Syrians in the north-eastern provinces of Syria.

In conclusion, the Niger calls on all stakeholders to ensure that the delivery of humanitarian assistance is sustained and unhindered and that humanitarian workers are protected in their work in all parts of Syria.

Annex VII

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

Let me, first of all, thank Under-Secretary-General Mark Lowcock for his briefing. We have heard a lot today with regard to the deteriorating humanitarian situation.

We were not able to receive answers to our questions at the last meeting. We hope it will be different this time.

We studied carefully the Secretary-General's report (S/2020/401) on the review of the United Nations humanitarian cross-line and cross-border operations, and would like to flag the following points.

The report cites economic problems inside Syria, such as price increases and shortages in some basic goods, but it ignores unilateral sanctions. We need the Secretary-General's assessments of how unilateral economic measures worsen the economic situation and hinder the fight against the coronavirus disease (COVID-19).

On humanitarian access to the north-west, according to reports of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), no COVID-19 cases have yet been confirmed in that region. Why, then, does it say in paragraph 14 of the report that the joint mission by the United Nations, the International Committee of the Red Cross and the Syrian Arab Red Crescent to Idlib approved by the Government of Syria was temporarily put on hold due to "concerns related to COVID-19"? What were those concerns? We have different information, which says that it was Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham that blocked that mission. To us, the reason is obvious: Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham does not want it — it would undermine their monopoly control over cross-border assistance.

We all know that Idlib is controlled by Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham, but the cross-border operations have always been regular. The resonating story with arbitrary levies by terrorists at Bab Al-Hawa border crossing in Idlib in late 2018 did not prevent the continuation of United Nations cross-border operations there. Even the Board of Inquiry, in its report of 6 April, admitted the financial accountability problems of humanitarian operations in Idlib — the United Nations does not know to whom it pays and cannot track the final distribution of aid.

Over the past five years, we have continuously underlined the need to make a list of implementing partners and detailed nomenclature of supplies, to perform systematic and preliminary notification of Syrian authorities and to mark convoys. But none of that has been taken on board.

We would like to get back to the Secretary-General's February report on the review of alternative modalities for the border crossing of Al-Yarubiyah (S/2020/139), since it contains much more food for thought, especially now that the ongoing campaign to reopen Al-Yarubiyah heats up and new arguments are taken out of an old box.

No clear explanation is provided for why five other crossing points to the east of the Euphrates controlled by Damascus cannot be used. In the Secretary-General's report, it is clearly stated that using those five would not require Security Council authorization. Our understanding of the problem with using those crossing points is that it would entail a request for the consent of Damascus.

As for recommendations in the report on the improvement of cross-line deliveries — which allegedly do not function properly but are in fact the source of the bulk of humanitarian assistance in Syria — the solution depends on one thing

only: whether there is strong interest on the part of humanitarians in delivering aid to those most in need rather than in inventing artificial obstacles and blaming Damascus.

When the Government of Syria is required, in paragraph 47 (c), to

“approve access to all areas and facilities within north-east to ensure that assistance reaches all people in need, impartially and without discrimination”,

OCHA forgets that some of those areas are not under the control of Damascus and, as such, Damascus simply cannot guarantee the demanded provisions. Such issues must be negotiated with local authorities. Does the United Nations have a plan on how to do it and how to guarantee, for its part, that the assistance will reach the most vulnerable? That applies to wherever the assistance comes from.

Let us turn to another recommendation, that in para 47 (d), addressing the “facilitation of deliveries by local authorities in the north-east to all locations without delay”. Whose prerogative is it to negotiate with local authorities? Who should be responsible for it? Who is the United Nations addressing this question to? Maybe our American colleagues can help with it?

I wish to welcome the first road convoy of the World Health Organization to the north-east. We definitely need to study this example carefully. The International Committee of the Red Cross and the non-governmental organization Médecins sans frontières continue working to the east of the Euphrates as well. That means that, no matter how complicated conditions are, it is possible to deliver humanitarian aid to the north-east of Syria. What is needed is the will to do so.

We would also like to welcome the intention of the United Nations to establish a laboratory in Qamishli based at the city’s national hospital. We heard this good news that in Geneva from the Resident Coordinator in Damascus, Mr. Imran Riza. We would like to receive more information on United Nations plans in this regard: among other things, how it will be equipped and how will test samples be collected, especially in the hard-to-reach areas not under the control of Damascus?

Concerning sanctions, repetitive slogans on humanitarian exemptions are — and I am sorry to say so — not worth a penny. I highly recommend that those colleagues — in particular Christoph, who addressed me yesterday — who keep insisting that unilateral restrictive measures are harmless to ordinary citizens should Google a recent European Union (EU) Commission guidance note on the provision of humanitarian aid to fight the COVID-19 pandemic in certain environments subject to EU restrictive measures, dated 11 May, which is specifically and in a timely manner focused on Syria.

That document fully proves quite the opposite. Let me quote just one excerpt:

“Sanctions may alter countries’ ability to fight COVID-19 by affecting the procurement of certain goods and technologies, either because such goods are subject to restrictions (for instance, dual-use goods which can also be used for military purposes), or because the persons involved in their procurement are sanctioned. In addition, there may be an indirect, but significant effect caused by certain operators’ unwillingness to engage in transactions related to a sanctioned country or individual, even if those are legitimate (over-compliance), for fear of accidentally violating the sanctions, or a lack of economic incentives to engage in comparison to the risks stemming from those transactions. In addition, those targeted by restrictive measures may pass on to the civilian population the economic consequences of international sanctions imposed on them, thus increasing hardship for the non-targeted civilian population”.

This relates to the claims aimed at whitewashing illegitimate sanctions regimes. As a recent example, I would cite the negative experience of the Norwegian Refugee Council when, owing to these restrictive measures, it refused to buy interactive educational programmes for children in Syria. I want to draw the attention of our Belgian colleagues, since they are responsible in the Council for the dossier on children.

To sum up, I would say to colleagues, having negotiated resolutions on the cross-border mechanism each time we agreed on its urgent but temporary status, that they should not pretend they do not know about it, or probably they want to forget. They should stop cherry-picking their individual political dividends that have nothing to do with humanitarian principles.

Today I would like to reiterate what I said last time. No time should be wasted on efforts to reopen the closed cross-border points. The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs should be encouraged to work with Damascus to find routes and cross-border points as well as on cross-line deliveries to the north-east and throughout Syria. And, of course, we want to hear answers to our new set of questions.

Annex VIII

Statement by the Political Coordinator of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines to the United Nations, Isis Gonsalves

At the outset, I wish to thank Mark Lowcock for his briefing.

Saint Vincent and the Grenadines once again reiterates the Special Envoy's call for a complete and immediate nationwide ceasefire throughout Syria. As the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) rages across the world, it is imperative that all parties pull back from hostilities and focus on combating the pandemic. In that context, we are pleased that the ceasefire in north-west Syria, although fragile, continues to hold.

Even before the emergence of the pandemic, Syria's health system was in a precarious position, having been crippled by a decade of war. Continued hostilities will only disrupt efforts to fight the virus and cause further deterioration of an already dire humanitarian situation.

We recognize that the pandemic has necessitated the implementation of restrictions on movement. However, we reiterate the need to strike a balance between these measures, aimed at containment and suppression, and the urgent need to preserve, scale up and coordinate the critical humanitarian response through all modalities.

We take note of the Secretary-General's timely review of humanitarian cross-line and cross-border operations (S/2020/401). The humanitarian situation is indeed a complex one, and there is no perfect solution. Humanitarian needs across Syria are great. Saint Vincent and the Grenadines therefore remains in support of the most favourable access arrangements, which will ensure the rapid, uninterrupted and direct provision of aid to all who need it.

Despite the pandemic, the scourge of terrorism remains and continues to threaten Syria's sovereignty, the safety of its people and vital humanitarian action. We recognize the need for counter-terrorism measures in this regard. However, we yet again reiterate that such measures must respect international law. Civilians and civilian infrastructure must be protected, and their targeting can never be justified.

We echo the appeal for the lifting of unilateral sanctions to assist Syria in addressing its pressing humanitarian needs. We further encourage members of the international community to contribute to Syria's reconstruction; without it, millions will remain displaced and deprived of basic necessities.

The dual threat of COVID-19 and conflict is leaving more people vulnerable than ever before. Humanitarian considerations must take precedence over political tensions, and we must prioritize cooperation.

Annex IX**Statement by the Permanent Mission of South Africa to the United Nations**

I would like to thank Mr. Lowcock for his comprehensive and frank briefing on the humanitarian situation in Syria. Let me take this opportunity to thank the hundreds of humanitarian actors, volunteers and implementing partners who continue to risk their own lives for the improvement of the lives of others.

The humanitarian challenges facing Syria are a direct consequence of the continued conflict. While we recognize the right of the Syrian Arab Republic to restore its control over the whole of its territory, South Africa is concerned about the conflict in the north-west region as well as the continuing conflict in the north-east of Syria, particularly its impact on the humanitarian situation. We urge all parties to seek a peaceful resolution of the conflict. Such a peaceful resolution requires a cessation of hostilities and a solution that upholds Syrian sovereignty and territorial integrity. For this to occur, external support for armed groups must cease immediately, as we cannot allow external role-players to use this devastating conflict in Syria as a proxy for their own interests.

The humanitarian challenges are being compounded by the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. The last few months have demonstrated that even the world's best and most highly funded health systems are straining under the impact and spread of the virus. In Syria, the last nine years of conflict have resulted in a fragile health system with a shortage of qualified health personnel and medical equipment and supplies, as well as damage and destruction to health and medical facilities. A cessation of hostilities throughout Syria and the safe, unimpeded and impartial delivery of humanitarian aid and assistance to all who require it, as well as the easing of sanctions, thus remain imperative.

Millions of people whose lives have already been marked by suffering and displacement have taken refuge in camps, shelters and informal sites that have limited access to essential services such as medical services, shelter and water and sanitation infrastructure. Social distancing and regular hand-washing are a luxury many have no access to.

With confirmed cases of COVID-19 now in Syria, including the particularly vulnerable north-east region, delivering life-saving assistance safely is now more challenging than ever. Preparedness and response planning are an essential component of any humanitarian response effort, and we commend the United Nations and its partners for their comprehensive COVID-19 response plan and encourage the international community to fully support those efforts. As has been mentioned previously, refugees and internally displaced persons in overcrowded camps, along with the elderly and people with underlying health conditions, are particularly vulnerable to COVID-19.

As has been reported in the Secretary-General's review of United Nations humanitarian cross-line and cross-border operations (S/2020/401), cross-line deliveries in the north-east are an essential component of the humanitarian response operation. Now is not the time to limit or reduce humanitarian assistance to this region, particularly given the confirmed cases of COVID-19 in the north-east. Gaps in the delivery of aid must be addressed.

In the north-west, the Secretary-General's review indicated that there is no alternative to the cross-border operations that can match the current scale and needs of humanitarian assistance. Where there is a need for assistance, all efforts must

be made to ensure that humanitarian cross-border assistance is provided, using the most direct means.

In conclusion, all parties must respect their obligations under international humanitarian law and international human rights law for the protection of civilians and civilian infrastructure. We, as members of the Security Council and the international community, must be united in support of both the political and humanitarian tracks to avoid a further humanitarian catastrophe and additional loss of life. South Africa calls on all parties to exert every effort to fully implement resolution 2254 (2015) and bring peace, security and stability to all of Syria.

Annex X**Statement by the Minister Plenipotentiary of Tunisia to the United Nations, Adel Ben Lagha**

I thank Mr. Mark Lowcock for his briefing.

The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic has made the challenge of delivering life-saving assistance to those in need across Syria ever more difficult. After nine years of conflict, Syria is enormously underequipped to deal with the pandemic, and Syrian health infrastructure is largely downgraded, fragmented or destroyed.

The restrictions imposed on cross-border and cross-line humanitarian movements widen the gaps and compound shortages, thus amplifying risks and vulnerabilities. It is critically urgent to narrow the gaps and scale up nationwide preparedness and response capacity so as to avoid a potentially catastrophic and overwhelming outbreak of the disease in Syria. A focused effort to fight COVID-19 requires sustained calm throughout Syria and the commitment of all parties to safe, timely, durable and unimpeded access of humanitarian aid, including of medical aid.

The recurring disruption of the water supply in north-eastern Syria because of the hostilities is yet another issue of serious concern, as it hampers sanitation and hygiene measures and aggravates vulnerabilities in the face of COVID-19 for nearly half a million people in the region. We call on the parties to protect civilian infrastructure, including water-supply infrastructure, in line with their obligations under international humanitarian law and international human rights law.

We thank the Secretary-General for his updated review, in implementation of resolution 2504 (2020), and take note of his recommendations on the way forward for cross-border and cross-line operations.

Tunisia reiterates that a dual approach, combining cross-border and cross-line modalities, that is firmly based on needs remains pertinent for ensuring the principled and effective delivery of humanitarian aid in Syria, along with a strengthened United Nations monitoring mechanism of cross-border operations. We stress the importance of such an approach being incremental, in a way that respects and ultimately preserves Syria's sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity.

In the light of the COVID-19 pandemic, cross-border and cross-line modalities will need to be recalibrated in northern Syria to ensure an efficient and coordinated health response. More cross-line modalities from within Syria will be needed in order to strengthen the cohesion of the Syrian national health response to the pandemic and prevent its further fragmentation across regions. In that regard, we welcome the stepping-up of cross-line operations in recent months in the north-east, the latest of which was the 10 May delivery by land of COVID-19 medical treatment items. We urge further cooperation and coordination between the United Nations and the Syrian authorities, including on outstanding approvals of vital medical aid.

We also look forward to the establishment of cross-line operations in the north-west following the 14 April agreement of Syrian authorities on a joint mission by the United Nations, the International Committee of the Red Cross and the Syrian Arab Red Crescent in the region.

Annex XI**Statement by the Chargé d'affaires of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the United Nations, Jonathan Allen**

Let me just start, if I might, by saying that I think that it is really important that we try to keep the politics out of our humanitarian discussions. That is one reason that we separate out into political, chemical weapons and humanitarian meetings each month on Syria, to enable us to focus on the evidence and the facts as we grapple with how we keep people alive, which is surely the most vital responsibility that the Council faces. I have to say that I listened with sadness today to one representative whose intervention was an attack on those providing aid across Syria and those paying for it. I want to remind everybody that the biggest donors to the Syria appeal are the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany and the European Union (EU), including those areas under Al-Assad's rule.

So what does an evidence-based approach tell us? Well, the United Kingdom is deeply concerned about the potentially catastrophic impact of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) in Syria, as highlighted by the World Health Organization. There are 48 confirmed cases in areas controlled by the Syrian authorities, as well as confirmed cases in the north-east and reported cases in the north-west. There are probably already many more. We cannot know because of the lack of testing capacity. And as the United Nations scales up prevention and protection against COVID-19 in areas controlled by the Syrian authorities and in the north-west, it follows that it must be allowed to do the same in the north-east. So it is gravely concerning the gaps in medical supplies in the north-east have in fact widened at a time when facilities should be urgently scaling up to prepare for the virus.

The United Nations has confirmed that, in terms of coverage or reach, cross-line access in the north-east has not improved since 2019, when the Al-Yarubiyah crossing was still operational. It is for that reason that in paragraph 19 of his latest report (S/2020/401), the Secretary-General said,

“The pressing need to prepare for a COVID-19 outbreak in the north-east has further and starkly highlighted the gap left by the removal of the Yarubiyah authorization”.

This could not be clearer. There is a clear problem in the north-east, and the United Nations and humanitarian organizations have told us what the answer is. We must not play politics with this virus when it is in our gift to enable aid to get through and save lives. We believe that the mandate for the Al-Yarubiyah crossing should be reauthorized as a matter of great urgency for as long as COVID-19 remains a threat to Syria.

Now let me turn to the north-west. If our objective is to save lives, then it is absolutely necessary that the Council renew resolution 2504 (2020) in a timely manner. Monthly truck crossings in March and April were more than double than over the same period last year. That increase in aid is in response to the increased humanitarian need within the region. The renewal of resolution 2504 (2020) therefore remains essential. There is no alternative. I wish to emphasize that, if the resolution were to not be renewed, then no one should have any illusions that the United Kingdom's considerable humanitarian funding for the north-west would automatically transfer to delivery via Damascus, particularly as serious questions remain about assistance from Damascus reaching those most in need.

A number of colleagues have talked about sanctions. Goods and medical supplies used for humanitarian purposes are not subject to EU sanctions, which are

now part of the United Kingdom's national legislation, and additional exemptions from sanctions are available for humanitarian activities in Syria.

In conclusion, the evidence is clearly set out in the Secretary-General's report. There remains a pressing humanitarian need across Syria. We must remember the millions of lives at stake. COVID-19 has changed the world we all live in. It has changed the situation on the ground in Syria. I believe it means that we must be ready to change our approach. We must put aside our political differences and act on the basis of humanitarian needs to authorize temporary cross-border access through Al-Yarubiyah. And we must, of course, renew resolution 2504 (2020). There is no other responsible course of action.

Annex XII**Statement by the Deputy Permanent Representative of the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam to the United Nations, Pham Hai Anh**

I would like to thank Under-Secretary-General Mark Lowcock for his briefing, which was very informative, as usual.

The overall humanitarian situation in Syria remains a great source of concern. The plight of millions of people continues both in the north-west, with about 840,000 still unsettled recently displaced persons, and in the north-east, where there is an acute shortage of medical supplies. Some other areas remain unreachable for humanitarian aid delivery, such as Rukban camp, as mentioned by the Secretary-General in his report (S/2020/401) and by the Under-Secretary-General in his briefing.

The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic requires special attention now, as it continues to raise the already-high level of complexity of the humanitarian situation in the country. On the one hand, we welcome the renewed efforts by the World Health Organization, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and other humanitarian partners to provide humanitarian support for Syria during this extraordinary time. We also take note of the efforts made by the Government of Syria to cope with the pandemic. On the other hand, we feel genuinely worried about the weak response capacity, in certain regions of Syria, of the health system, which is now being seriously challenged.

We therefore urge all relevant parties in Syria to fully cooperate in creating the most favourable conditions possible to ensure sustained and unimpeded humanitarian access to all parts of Syria in order to assist people in need.

The support of the international community in ensuring an effective humanitarian response in Syria is undoubtedly of crucial importance — especially during this time — to address the needs of Syrian people, including the food security and health concerns. The COVID-19 pandemic is the fight of the entire international community, and no one should lag or be left behind in this joint fight. In that connection, we call for renewed and unconditional support to increase Syria's capacity and resources.

However, if that is to happen, we must address the daunting challenge of ensuring security. While we welcome the calm in the north-west over the past two months, we also reiterate our full support for the call of the Secretary-General and the Special Envoy for a ceasefire in Syria, and call on all parties to heed their call.

We thank the Secretary-General for the recently released report on the review of United Nations humanitarian cross-line and cross-border operations, pursuant to resolution 2504 (2020), and take note of his assessments therein. We will continue to look into it and will engage in the discussion on the cross-border humanitarian delivery mechanism with a view to best assisting the Syrian people.

In conclusion, we continue to call for peace. We need people to build peace and to enjoy it. Let us put an end to what kills and maims the Syrian people — conflict and COVID-19.

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

[Original: Arabic and English]

My country, Syria, both in its national capacity and in cooperation with several other States Members of the United Nations, has sent a number of official letters and appeals to both the Secretary-General and successive Presidents of the Security Council demanding to put an end to the economic, commercial, financial and health terrorism inflicted by unilateral coercive measures imposed by some Member States on the Syrian people and other friendly peoples.

Our calls were positively received by the Secretary-General and several senior officials of the Organization, including Mr. Geir Pedersen, United Nations Special Envoy for Syria, the Special Rapporteur on the negative impact of the unilateral coercive measures on the enjoyment of human rights, the Special Rapporteur on the right to food and representatives of the World Health Organization. All these senior officials, together with 40 international and United Nations bodies, have demanded an end to the measures imposed on around 2 billion people in affected countries.

Nevertheless, the United States Administration and its allies have continued to violate international law, the Charter of the United Nations and human rights instruments. Over the past two months, they have deliberately spared no effort to thwart all initiatives and draft resolutions demanding an end to the negative impact of unilateral coercive measures on the health and service sectors in affected countries while they are fighting the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic.

That is not all. The United States Administration announced an extension of the unilateral coercive measures imposed on the Syrian people — in wanton disregard of international law, the United Nations Charter and the relevant resolutions — despite all appeals to do away with those measures.

The stance of the United States Administration manifests a new step in its hostile policies towards my country and refutes the humanitarian claims presented by the representatives of the Administration and its allies, whether inside or outside the United Nations.

Over the past years, I have repeatedly briefed the Council on the catastrophic impact of the coercive measures on the daily lives of 24 million Syrians and how those measures hinder State institutions and the health, economic and service sectors in Syria from effectively fulfilling their duties. The COVID-19 pandemic has increased the magnitude of the workload and challenges created by those measures. I once again highlight the hollow humanitarian pretences presented by some Western Governments that recently even refused to allow Syrian airplanes to repatriate Syrian nationals stranded in European countries.

The clarifications recently issued by the European Commission about coercive measures demonstrate, once again, what we have always said — that these measures only harm people. We therefore stress the fact that those Governments do not intend to lift these measures, which lack any acceptable moral, economic or political basis.

The unilateral sanctions imposed by the European Union and the United States cannot be justified, because they are illegal, attempt to circumvent the legitimacy of the Security Council and seek to undermine the sovereignty of the Syrian State. As a matter of fact, this is nothing but a desperate attempt by the Western Governments that impose coercive measures on my country to humanize their vicious behaviour and the economic terrorism and collective punishment practiced by them against the

Syrians living in areas under Government control. We assure the Council that, due to the imposition of a wide package of restrictions and preconditions on supplies, the prospect of European and American humanitarian and medical supplies reaching Syria is nil. Nevertheless, we will not be deceived by allegations made by those countries, and we will not give in to their dictates in any way.

In that context, my delegation reiterates its demand that the Council immediately insist that the Secretary-General submit to it a comprehensive report on the disastrous impact of the unilateral coercive measures imposed on the Syrian people within the next 30 days. That is an essential part of our understanding of the humanitarian concerns at play and the impartial, objective and professional role of the United Nations in humanitarian work, international cooperation in fighting the COVID-19 pandemic and the implementation of the principle of leaving no one behind and other important principles that form the parameters of work of the United Nations.

My Government reaffirms its position regarding Brussels conferences and stresses that they are nothing but propaganda aimed at the implementation of the agendas of the hostile countries that organize and sponsor such conferences in a flagrant politicization of humanitarian work and the imposition of their preconditions and deep-rooted obstinacy.

My Government reiterates that it does not recognize any Syria-related initiatives or meetings without the participation of, and full coordination with, its Government. My Government also renews its demand that the United Nations not participate in such conferences, so as to maintain its impartial role and ensure its respect of humanitarian work parameters, under resolution 46/182.

The Turkish occupation forces in north-west Syria, along with the American occupation forces in the north-east and in the Al-Tanf area, where Rukban camp is located, continue to support terrorist organizations and their proxy separatist militias. That fact has been confirmed through the confessions of a number of terrorists belonging to the Islamic State in Iraq and the Shams who were recently captured by the Syrian Arab Army, and who confirmed that they had been trained by the terrorist Maghawir Al-Thawra group, under the supervision of American occupation forces in Al-Tanf. Such behaviour has been met with absolute silence in the Council, as some of its permanent members are seeking to transform the Council into a platform for NATO and an umbrella for the defence of their allies within it, all while turning a blind eye to their violations of international law and the purposes and principles of the United Nations.

In the light of the sponsorship and investment in terrorist organizations, the Al-Nusra Front and its partner terrorist groups have reorganized their forces in their areas of presence in north-west Syria to launch further terrorist attacks, as we witnessed a few days ago when Huras Al-Din and the Turkistan Islamic Party — or “moderate terrorists”, as some like to describe them — reorganized themselves and launched an attack on one of the Syrian army military points in the village of Tanjara, adjacent to the Al-Ghab region in the north-west. That attack led to a number of martyrs and wounded many others. Moreover, terrorists of the Turkish-backed Turkistan Islamic Party destroyed the Zayzoun power plant tower in the Idlib countryside, which alone is worth about \$44 million, after having jointly looted, with Turkish technicians, the plant’s equipment, estimated at \$660 million. They then transported the equipment into Turkish territory through crossings — controlled by the terrorist organizations and their Turkish sponsors, and claimed by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) as humanitarian crossings. That is compounded by the crimes committed by Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham, the latest of

which is drilling to extract metal pipes, copper cables and landline wires to be sold in the Turkish market.

The Turkish regime also continues to use water as a weapon against Syrian civilians in the city of Al-Hasakah and its surrounding communities by cutting off water from the Allouk station, thereby depriving 1 million Syrians of drinking water, which is a documented war crime and crime against humanity. The Council must meet urgently to put an end to such crimes and hold the war criminals in the Turkish regime accountable, instead of covering up the crimes and holding numerous supposedly urgent meetings on fabricated and artificial issues.

Today the Turkish regime is again violating its obligations under international law and the agreements governing international waters and rivers by constructing the Ilisu Dam along the Tigris River and starting to fill the dam's artificial lake, which will deprive millions of Syrians and Iraqis of water from the Tigris for years.

Furthermore, the United States occupation forces have prevented the Syrian Arab Red Crescent from working in north-east Syria and have sought to replace it with illegal organizations that are not recognized by the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. Moreover, the Turkish regime also attempted to bring the Turkish Red Crescent to work in the areas it occupies in the north and north-west of Syria and prevent the Syrian Arab Red Crescent from working there as well. It has also attacked its offices, looted their contents and attacked its workers, just as Israel — the occupying Power — has done since its occupation of the Syrian Golan in 1967.

In that way, the Israeli occupation and the Turkish occupation are similar in their violations of the decisions of the founding conference of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. What is worse is that the Turkish regime has pitted its affiliated terrorist groups against the Syrian Arab Red Crescent and urged them to prevent humanitarian access from within Syrian territories as a pretext for extending cross-border activities. That is a common practice that we and our partners in humanitarian work have previously seen in a number of areas, including the eastern and southern regions, with the aim of justifying the expansion of cross-border activities and facilitating the smuggling of arms, equipment and supplies to terrorist organizations.

Accordingly, my country reaffirms its rejection of cross-border activities and again demands the closure of the OCHA office in Gaziantep, which has become an instrument for anti-Syria Governments and armed terrorist groups, a mouthpiece of lies and a platform to mislead the Security Council and world public opinion. My country emphasizes that improving the humanitarian situation will require the full cooperation of, and coordination with, the Syrian Government. In addition, the politicization of humanitarian action must end, and hostile Governments should refrain from enacting policies that impose coercive measures, preconditions and obstacles on humanitarian and developmental assistance.

It is unfortunate to see that some Council members prefer starting fires to putting them out, notwithstanding their duties as members of the Security Council. It is crystal clear that Council members are not performing their duties in a realistic and transparent manner; indeed, they are part of the problem, not the solution. They are therefore unable to play a positive role in meetings of the Council designed to help the Syrian people. When they use the term "regime" instead of "Government", they are showing their real intentions.

Annex XIV**Statement by the Permanent Representative of Turkey to the United Nations, Feridun Hadi Sinirliöglu**

I thank the President of the Security Council for organizing today's meeting. I also thank Under-Secretary-General Lowcock for his briefing and salute the work of all humanitarian workers intended to help the Syrian people.

More than 9 million Syrians live under the care and protection of Turkey. Nearly 5 million of them live right across Turkey's border with Syria. I am participating in today's meeting to voice what those individuals urgently expect from the international community.

In the north-west, the situation in Idlib remains desperate. The regime's indiscriminate military campaign has made the health services in place unprepared to confront the coronavirus disease (COVID-19). Today only 55 per cent of the health facilities in the region are operational, while 75 per cent of health workers have fled or been killed.

There are currently no confirmed COVID-19 cases in the region. Yet, given the population density, the number of highly vulnerable groups, the insufficient means available and the inadequate measures taken, this is a high-risk region.

Against the backdrop of this imminent threat, United Nations cross-border operations continue unabated, with the support and facilitation of my Government. We have increased the duration and volume of deliveries via Bab Al-Hawa and Bab Al-Salam. As a result, in March and April, the number of truck crossings per month reached the highest levels.

The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and the Turkish Red Crescent have dispatched masks, coveralls and ventilators to north-west Syria. More than 10,000 test kits and thousands of other pandemic-related items have been delivered to Idlib through the cross-border mechanism. However, these figures cover only 1 per cent of current needs. It is crucial that all international stakeholders, especially the World Health Organization, increase their humanitarian assistance. Donors must also continue to prioritize funding for this response.

We must note that the United Nations cross-border assistance is the only way to meet the humanitarian needs of these people. There is no alternative that can match the scale and scope of these operations. In this time of pandemic, we must strengthen the existing mechanism. In the north-east, the health-care system is broken, and there is no capacity to mitigate the pandemic.

By disrupting the humanitarian response, the regime is weaponizing the virus against Syrian civilians. In his review of United Nations humanitarian cross-line and cross-border operations (S/2020/401), the Secretary-General reports that, since the closure of Al-Yarubiyah border gate, diminished cross-line deliveries can cover only 31 per cent of the facilities previously supported. Again, the regime imposes death or surrender as the only options.

To meet the needs of hospitals, we must urgently authorize the United Nations to conduct cross-border humanitarian aid in the region. As recommended by the Secretary-General, the Tel Abyad border gate is the most feasible alternative to Al-Yarubiyah. The people of the region urgently need the inclusion of Tel Abyad in the aid mechanism. Otherwise, the pandemic could create additional devastating consequences for civilians. Once the Security Council provides the necessary authorization, we are ready to immediately operationalize the Tel Abyad border gate for cross-border assistance and meet all the humanitarian needs in the north-east.

I would also like to touch upon issues relating to water and electricity supplies. Despite our repeated calls and initiatives, there is a serious shortage of electricity and water supply in Ras Al-Ayn and Al-Bab. This is causing serious concern among the local populations and impedes efforts to effectively combat COVID-19.

Electricity grids to the Ras Al-Ayn region and the water supply lines to the Al-Bab region come from the south. The electricity supply from Tishrin Dam to Ras Al-Ayn is interrupted on a regular basis by the terrorist organization People's Protection Units/Kurdistan Workers' Party. Furthermore, the Tishrin Dam is the only source of electrical power to the region.

As the water pumps operate on electrical power, the power cut in Ras Al-Ayn affects the proper functioning of the Allouk water station and eventually constrains the water supply from the south. As we have explained on numerous occasions, the allegation that the water supply to the Al-Hasakah region has been deliberately prevented is baseless. And, as it comes from the murderous Al-Assad regime, it is a shameless lie.

In the last 10 years, the Al-Assad regime has killed hundreds of thousands of people. The regime has used chemical weapons, shelled schools and bombed hospitals. We thought we had seen the worst in Syria. But now we are faced with a situation where the regime is ready to use COVID-19 as a biological weapon by further restricting humanitarian access. Since February, the Secretary-General has published three reports, all of which emphasize the suffering of the Syrian people at the hands of the Al-Assad regime.

For more than nine years, my country has assumed the responsibility of protecting the Syrian people on behalf of the international community, not only in Syria but also in our own homeland. We will continue to do so until Syrian people's dignity is restored.

That can be achieved only with the strong support of the Security Council. In the face of the pandemic, we need the cross-border mechanism more than ever. Renewal of the mechanism with two current crossing points in the north-west and one additional gate in the north-east is an absolute necessity. To enable the United Nations and its partners for longer-term humanitarian planning under the unpredictable circumstances resulting from COVID-19, the Security Council must authorize the mechanism without delay and for at least 12 months, as Under-Secretary-General Lowcock has requested.

This is not a political matter, but our humanitarian duty for millions of Syrians. The Security Council has the obligation to prevent the recurrence of another humanitarian tragedy in Syria. It is time for the international community to stay united and act in concert. This is what the Syrian people expect from all of us now.

The previous speaker again repeated his usual delusional allegations and shameless lies and does not deserve any response from me. It is the Syrian people who will answer the criminal regime he represents when they save and rebuild their country. These criminals — the Al-Assad regime and its representatives — will be held accountable and brought to justice for all the war crimes and crimes against humanity they have committed.