



موقف المؤسسات غير الحكومية السورية بخصوص ملف المساعدات عبر الحدود

Joint Statement - The Position of the Syrian Non-Governmental Organizations Regarding the Recent Developments on the Cross-Border Humanitarian Assistance

31 August 2023

Humanitarian needs in Syria remain at an all-time high, particularly in the aftermath of the earthquakes that have hit the region in February. Cross-border humanitarian operations continue to be a lifeline for more than 4.1 million people in northwest Syria, whose lives are dependent on the aid provided by local and international NGOs and UN agencies.

The failure of the UN Security Council to reach an agreement to renew Resolution 2672 greatly threatens the continuation of humanitarian operations in northwest Syria. As UN Secretary-General Gutierrez underscored in his reports, cross-border assistance into northwest Syria is essential to an independent and principled response and is a safeguard against the politicization of humanitarian assistance in Syria. The inability of the Security Council to renew the cross-border resolution due to the Russian veto, coupled with the Syrian regime's well-documented history of aid obstruction, its politicization, and most recent implications of the consent model, confirm the critical need to ensure that humanitarian assistance reaches those who need it most in northwest Syria. This aid must be delivered in a principled and dignified manner without conditions or arbitrary timeframes that threaten the sustainability and effectiveness of humanitarian operations. Here, we reaffirm our position that the United Nations cross-border operations are legal, and do not require the approval of the Security Council or the Syrian regime.

The recent agreement between the United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, Martin Griffiths, and the Syrian Regime consenting to cross-border aid will lead to catastrophic effects on humanitarian operations in northwest Syria. This new arrangement has shifted the approval of cross-border access via UN Security Council resolutions to one that relies on authorization by the Syrian regime. Under the Syrian regime's purview, the consent model gives way to arbitrary withdrawal of consent without formal assurances and with a perceived compromise to the sustainability and effectiveness of the humanitarian response. Given the history of various human rights violations perpetrated by the Syrian regime, there is a threat to the principled delivery of humanitarian assistance, and a pronounced threat to humanitarian actors on the ground. By effectively handing over control to the Syrian regime, this arrangement marks a new era of fear, instability, insecurity, and a threat to the future of principled, cross-border assistance.

The consent model and its implications put the population of northwest Syria, particularly women and children who account for nearly 80% of those most vulnerable and who rely on humanitarian assistance, at the greatest risk. We must also underscore the alarming nature of this model among the affected population, given the history of indiscriminate attacks to civilians (including aid workers) and civilian infrastructure, including attacks on schools, marketplaces, neighborhoods, hospitals, and clinics by the Syrian regime. This agreement has caused a wave of protests and demonstrations among communities across northwest Syria, who now interpret that their fate lies in the hands of the same regime that once

besieged, forcibly displaced, and violated their basic rights. In light of the fragile and ever-worsening humanitarian situation, there is a need for timely, unhindered, and unconditional access. The involvement of the Syrian regime in the humanitarian response through a consent approach is yet another example of the politicization of humanitarian aid for Syria and leaves cross-border operations susceptible to a breach of humanitarian principles.

In addition, this arrangement with the Syrian regime disregards the original impetus for UN Security Council Resolution 2139, which was an unprecedented step of authorizing cross-border operations in Syria. This measure was to protect aid from interference by the Syrian regime and to ensure access to life-saving humanitarian assistance by the civilian population, including those in besieged areas who rely on UN aid and humanitarian convoys. This interference continues to this day, as exemplified by the case of Rukban camp, and as affirmed in the report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Resolution 2672.

In light of the uncertainty and concerns related around the consent model, the undersigned organizations would like to underscore the following positions:

- At a fundamental level, we object to the process undertaken by the UN to negotiate cross-border humanitarian access with the regime in a manner where key stakeholders, namely affected communities, were not consulted prior to the unilateral consent model agreed upon. We reaffirm the legal position that humanitarian cross-border access into northwest Syria, and all areas of Syria outside the control of the Syrian regime is legal in accordance with International Humanitarian Law, for all humanitarian actors, including UN agencies, and does not require the approval of the Syrian Regime nor the authorization of the Security Council. International and local NGOs should continue their humanitarian operations based on the needs of the population in Syria. We also call on the UN to review its legal position to allow its agencies to continue their operations on this basis for 2024 and beyond.
- We stress the importance of keeping the needs and concerns of local communities at the heart of the humanitarian response in northwest Syria. This is central to the notion of accountability to affected populations and community acceptance, particularly in light of the consent model and the protection risks it has created. We call on the UN, donors, and other key stakeholders to ensure the continuity of operations and key functions through the Gaziantep hub for northwest Syria, regardless of the conditions imposed by the consent model.
- We emphasize the importance of maintaining the independence of the Whole of Syria architecture, and a regional leadership base in Amman. This will preserve the autonomy, independence, and integrity of the northwest Syria response, and will ensure the protection of information of affected populations and Syrian humanitarian workers.
- We continue to emphasize the need for donors to take concrete steps towards localizing the humanitarian response in Syria through all possible avenues. This includes increasing direct funding to local humanitarian organizations and engaging local actors and communities in coordination, leadership, and development. This should also include local resilience initiatives to reduce aid dependency and ultimately reduce the politicization of aid.
- We strongly encourage donors to continue funding operations in northwest Syria through modalities that ensure aid reaches the population in a principled and dignified manner. Given the shrinking of funds to Syria for 2024 onwards, there is the need to ensure needs on the ground are met with the most effective and impactful approaches. In the event that UN agencies are unable to continue operations, new modalities should be explored to ensure the continuity of operations through Syrian and international NGOs. This alternative solution should ensure sustainable, long-term planning that guarantees unconditional access and should prioritize the needs of affected communities.

Signatories:

NGOs:

1. Adel and Ehsan
2. Al Sham Humanitarian Foundation
3. Alameen For humanitarian support
4. Al-Bir Humanist Association
5. All Together
6. Al-Serraj Organization for Development and Health Care
7. And Hope Remains
8. Aryaf Organization
9. ATAA
10. Basma for Relief and Development
11. Big Heart Foundation
12. BINAA Organization for Development
13. Bonyan
14. Cennet Azığı
15. Education Without Borders - MIDAD
16. Elaf for Relief and Development
17. El-Vefa Association for Relief and Development
18. Foundation of Hamidhayrat
19. Freedom Jasmine
20. Hafed Nama
21. HIHFAD
22. Himma Youth Association
23. Horan Foundation - HF
24. Human Rights Guardians
25. Humanitarian Relief Association - IYD
26. Ihsan Relief and Development
27. Independent Doctors Association -IDA
28. Insan Charity Organization
29. International humanitarian relief-IHR
30. International Relief and Development
31. Jasmine Association
32. Justice et Développement Durable
33. Kareemat Organization
34. La Tahzan charity
35. MARS Organization
36. MedGlobal
37. Mercy Without Limits
38. MHO
39. Molham Volunteering Team
40. Nasaem Khair Organization
41. Nexus Action
42. One Heart

Networks:

1. American Relief Coalition for Syria - ARCS
2. Civil Society Organizations Platform - ULFED
3. Independent Coordination Mechanism - ICM
4. Snaa Alathr Network
5. Syrian Alliance for Volunteer Teams - SAVT
6. Syrian Networks League - SNL
7. Syrian NGO Alliance - SNA
8. Union des Organisations Caritatives en France - UOCF
9. Union Elaf Union for Relief and development - ELAF
10. Voices for Displaced Syrians Forum - VDSF
11. Watan Network
12. We Can Network
13. Women Protection Network - WPN

43. Organization ALAMMAN
44. Physicians Across Continents - Turkey
45. Qabasin Volunteer Team
46. Rahma Worldwide
47. Sadad organization
48. Safa Development Association
49. Salsabil Charity Association
50. SEMA International
51. Shafak
52. SKT Organization
53. Social Development International - SDI
54. Space Of Peace
55. Syria Relief
56. Syrian American Medical Society - SAMS
57. Syrian Engineers for Construction and Development
58. Syrian Forum
59. Syrian Network for Human Rights - SNHR
60. Syrian Society for Relief and Development - SSRD
61. Syrian Women's Association
62. Taç Kur'ana Hizmet ve Kültür Derneği
63. Takaful Al Sham
64. The Female Survivors Union
65. The White Helmets
66. Together to build the country
67. Union of Relief and Medical Care Organizations France - UOSSM
68. Unity and Cooperation Organization
69. VIOLET Organization
70. Woman Support Association
71. Women and Child Protection Network NGO
72. Zeyd Bin Sabit
73. ZIDNE