

Renewing cross-border humanitarian access in Syria

Statement by Ambassador Barbara Woodward

I would like to thank Under-Secretary-General Mark Lowcock for his briefing and Sonia Khush for her first-hand analysis and, through her, Save the Children for its life-saving work. I would like to register the UK's disappointment that Su'ad Jarbawi of the International Rescue Committee was not able to brief the Council today on the realities of aid delivery in the north-west, following an objection from another Council member.

As the Secretary General set out in his latest report, the Syrian population has entered 2021 amidst some of the most challenging humanitarian conditions experienced in the past ten years of conflict. An unprecedented 12.4 million people are food insecure – an increase of 4.5 million people in just one year. As we have heard today, children are bearing the brunt of this crisis with one in eight children now stunted as a result of malnutrition.

Millions of people in north-west Syria depend on cross-border assistance; cross-line access is no substitute. The situation is more acute with torrential rains and flooding in the north-west. Aid running through Bab al-Hawa has never been more important.

In north-east Syria, cross-line aid delivery from Damascus has failed to fill the gaps left by the closure of the Yaroubiya crossing. The prevention of humanitarian food distributions, by bureaucratic impediments or due to tensions between armed actors, in the north-east shows cross-line modalities alone cannot be relied on. The Undersecretary General for Humanitarian Affairs has told this Council, on at least five occasions since June 2020, that cross-line assistance is not delivering at the scale or frequency needed to meet humanitarian needs.

The Syrian authorities and the Russian Federation claim that cross-line access is enough to sustain the humanitarian needs of three quarters of the population is untenable. As is the claim that the West is somehow to blame.

As a first step, we urge the UN to provide comprehensive details of what types of assistance are being delivered and where the greatest gaps lie.

The rationale for renewing the cross-border mandate in July has not diminished. To quote the Secretary-General, more access is needed, not less. And we've heard clearly this morning from Save the Children that 'there is no other way to sustainably program for millions of people without the cross-border resolution'. This Council must do everything in its power to ensure this vital assistance continues.