



# Security Council

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## Review of United Nations humanitarian cross-line and cross-border operations

### Report of the Secretary-General

#### I. Introduction

1. The present review is submitted pursuant to paragraph 7 of Security Council resolution [2504 \(2020\)](#), in which the Council requested that, within six months of the adoption of the resolution, the Secretary-General conduct an independent written review of the United Nations humanitarian cross-line and cross-border operations, including recommendations on how to further strengthen the United Nations Monitoring Mechanism for the Syrian Arab Republic, in order to ensure that humanitarian assistance reaches people in need through the most direct routes, taking into account the views of relevant parties, including the Syrian authorities, the relevant neighbouring countries of the Syrian Arab Republic and the United Nations humanitarian agencies and their implementing partners. I am submitting the present report ahead of schedule to allow the Council to take a timely decision so as to ensure that there is no disruption in the provision of aid to people in need.

2. The information contained herein is based on available data from the United Nations system and other relevant sources.

#### II. Humanitarian situation in areas accessed through cross-line and cross-border operations

3. There are 6.2 million people living in areas not under government control in the Syrian Arab Republic, of whom 4.2 million are in need of humanitarian assistance. People in need in areas not under government control are concentrated in the north-west and north-east of the country, with a smaller population located in the south-east, in Rukban, and can only be accessed through cross-line and cross-border operations. Humanitarian needs in areas not under government control are especially acute, owing to intense levels of hostilities in the north-west and north-east over the past year and a high proportion of internally displaced people, often living in informal settlements and collective centres with substandard facilities.

4. Of the estimated 4 million people now living in the north-west of the country, 70 per cent require humanitarian assistance, most of whom are internally displaced. A new wave of rapid mass displacement has exacerbated the already dire humanitarian situation. Almost 1 million civilians fled intensified hostilities that



commenced in early December 2019, forcing families to move during the harsh winter months. Many had already been displaced multiple times. Some 540,000 people moved north-west of Idlib, into a small and increasingly crowded area along the Syrian-Turkish border. That most recent mass population movement followed the displacement of some 400,000 people in the north-west between May and August 2019. Alarming nutrition data are a grim indicator of the deteriorating situation. In early 2019, some 5 per cent of pregnant and lactating women in the north-west were acutely malnourished. That figure has increased to some 40 per cent in early 2020.

5. Of the estimated 2.2 million people living in areas of the north-east that are not under government control, 64 per cent are in need of humanitarian assistance, including half a million internally displaced people. Over 100,000 people are living in camps, including Hawl, which hosts some 65,000 people, the majority of whom are children. Some areas in the north-east are reporting increasingly severe shortages of medical items, following the removal of Ya‘rubiyah as an authorized border crossing for United Nations humanitarian cross-border operations (see section III).

6. In the south-east, an estimated 12,000 people remain in Rukban and surrounding areas. In the absence of regular humanitarian deliveries, conditions in the camp deteriorated in 2019, including an alarming increase in food insecurity, compounded by the disruption of informal commercial supply routes to the camp in February 2020. Measures related to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) have also disrupted access to United Nations health-care facilities in Jordan, and protection concerns continue.

7. The World Health Organization (WHO) warns that the impact of COVID-19 could be truly catastrophic in the Syrian Arab Republic. The risk of an outbreak is considered high, in the light of the country’s fragile health system, high levels of population movement and the practical difficulties involved in implementing isolation and protective measures in many areas of displacement. In the north-west, high population density, combined with low levels of sanitation services and a severely degraded health care system, compound risks of an outbreak. In the north-east, the presence of the virus has been confirmed. Not a single district in the north-east meets the minimum standard of 18 hospital beds for every 10,000 people, and the ability to deliver medical items, including those required for the COVID-19 response, to parts of the region has been further impeded by the removal of Ya‘rubiyah as an authorized border crossing for United Nations humanitarian cross-border operations (see section III). Economic impacts attributable to measures taken to prevent the spread of COVID-19 are also becoming apparent, with significant price increases and shortages in some basic goods recorded across the country.

### **III. Humanitarian access and response through cross-line and cross-border operations**

8. The United Nations and its humanitarian partners provide humanitarian assistance on the sole basis of independent assessments, using all available avenues to reach those in need. In 2014, in the light of constraints in accessing areas not under the control of the Government, the Security Council authorized United Nations humanitarian agencies and their implementing partners to use routes across conflict lines and to use specific border crossings to ensure that humanitarian assistance, including medical and surgical supplies, reaches people in need throughout the Syrian Arab Republic through the most direct routes, with notification to the Syrian authorities. Since 2014, the United Nations has delivered over 1,200 cross-border consignments of humanitarian assistance in more than 36,000 trucks across the four border crossings named in Council resolution [2165 \(2014\)](#) (see table 1). Under Council resolution [2504 \(2020\)](#), the use of two border crossings, Bab al-Hawa and

Bab al-Salam, is currently authorized, thus enabling cross-border assistance into the north-west of the Syrian Arab Republic from Turkey. Authorization for the use of the Ya‘rubiyah border crossing in the north-east and the Ramtha border crossing in the south-west was not extended under resolution [2504 \(2020\)](#).

Table 1  
**Total number of trucks crossing through United Nations authorized border crossings, July 2014 to April 2020**

<i>Border crossing</i>	<i>Number of trucks</i>
Bab al-Hawa (Turkey)	27 105
Bab al-Salam (Turkey)	4 462
Ya‘rubiyah (Iraq) <sup>a</sup>	109
Ramtha (Jordan)	4 595
<b>Total</b>	<b>36 271</b>

<sup>a</sup> Although designated as an authorized crossing point in Security Council resolution [2165 \(2014\)](#) and subsequent resolutions, the Ya‘rubiyah border crossing could not be used by the United Nations and its implementing partners until 2018, owing to the presence of elements of Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant in the area.

Table 2  
**Average number of people reached by the United Nations and its implementing partners through cross-border operations in the Syrian Arab Republic, January to December 2019**

<i>Organization</i>	<i>Average number of people reached monthly</i>
Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations	6 000
International Organization for Migration	101 000
Mine Action Service	7 470
Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees	56 000
United Nations Children’s Fund	374 000
United Nations Development Programme	8 500
United Nations Population Fund	228 000
World Food Programme	895 000
World Health Organization	398 000 <sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Refers to treatments provided, not people reached.

9. Both cross-line and cross-border modalities are fundamental to sustaining the massive humanitarian response operation in the Syrian Arab Republic. In 2019, humanitarian operations through all modalities reached an average of 6 million people across the country each month. Nearly half of that assistance went to people in need in the north-west and the north-east.

10. The COVID-19 crisis is significantly altering the operating environment across the country. Most land border crossings have been closed and international flights suspended, with limited exemptions. In the northwest, the Bab al-Hawa and Bab al-Salam border crossings remained open for humanitarian and commercial shipments, but were closed to individual movements other than emergency medical cases. In the north-east, the Fish Khabur/Samalka informal border crossing was closed in early March and subsequently opened one day per week for humanitarian staff

movements and transfers of humanitarian supplies. Restrictions on movement are in place within the Syrian Arab Republic, to varying degrees, and facilitation procedures for humanitarian movements are gradually being established. Restrictions related to COVID-19 have resulted in several humanitarian partners suspending or cancelling programming, with education, protection, livelihoods and psychosocial support services particularly affected.

### **North-west Syrian Arab Republic**

11. Cross-border operations via the Security Council-authorized Bab al-Hawa and Bab al-Salam border crossings currently constitute the only channel for the United Nations to assist the 2.8 million people in need in the north-west. United Nations assistance to civilians in the north-west is delivered in partnership with both Syrian and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) operating cross-border from Turkey. In addition, there are significant commercial deliveries of basic items crossing the border. Cross-border humanitarian actors are generally able to access most parts of the north-west that are not under government control and carry out relatively sustained and unimpeded deliveries. The most significant access restrictions are in sparsely populated frontline areas in southern Idlib and western Aleppo, where shelling continues to be reported despite an agreement between the Russian Federation and Turkey to cease all military actions along the line of contact in the Idlib de-escalation area starting from 6 March 2020. Humanitarian access in northern Aleppo has improved, owing to an increase in the number of cross-border partners authorized by the Government of Turkey to operate in the Afrin, I'zaz and Bab districts as from February 2020.

12. Operations have been scaled up significantly since 2019 in response to the drastic deterioration in the humanitarian situation in the north-west. Some 1.8 million people were reached with cross-border food assistance in March 2020, up from 560,000 people in January 2019. The scale-up was supported by the agreement of Turkish authorities to keep border crossings open an additional two days, so as to operate seven days per week. In early January 2020, more than 100 trucks of humanitarian aid crossed each day over the span of one week. The highest numbers of monthly truck crossings, across all authorized border crossings combined, since the establishment of the United Nations Monitoring Mechanism in 2014 were recorded in March 2020, with 1,486 trucks crossing, and in April 2020, with 1,365 trucks crossing. Compared with March and April 2019, these represent increases of 180 per cent and 131 per cent, respectively. A further scale-up is planned in order to meet the continued high level of needs in the weeks and months ahead, and in response to the risks associated with COVID-19.

13. On 2 March, the United Nations undertook a cross-border mission into the north-west to assess the situation on the ground and see the aid operation under way. The inter-agency mission was led by the Regional Humanitarian Coordinator, and its members witnessed, first-hand, the dire humanitarian consequences of the violence in Idlib, finding civilians traumatized, frightened and in urgent need of better access to shelter, food, sanitation, basic health services and protection.

14. The scale-up of cross-border assistance into the north-west was conducted alongside continued efforts to establish cross-line access from within the Syrian Arab Republic, in keeping with the basic operational principle of using all modalities to reach all people in need, in all parts of the country. No cross-line deliveries into the north-west, however, have been possible to date. Consistent efforts are being exerted with parties in Idlib to establish cross-line access. On 19 March 2020, a note verbale was submitted to the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of the Syrian Arab Republic requesting a joint mission by the United Nations, the International Committee of the Red Cross and the Syrian Arab Red Crescent to Atarib, Darat Izzah and surrounding

locations. The request received a positive response from the Syrian authorities on 14 April. The mission was temporarily put on hold owing to concerns related to COVID-19, and a new request will be made when conditions are in place to conduct the mission.

### **North-east Syrian Arab Republic**

15. In the north-east, the United Nations maintains regular and sustained humanitarian access from its Qamishli sub-offices to most parts of Raqqah and Hasakah Governorates, with the exception of critical health and medical supplies. Access constraints remain in parts of Dayr al-Zawr Governorate, with limited operational presence due to insecurity, as well as extensive contamination by unexploded ordnance. Other areas, including Manbij and Ayn al-Arab, remain difficult to access from Damascus, owing to the lack of agreement between parties and insecurity. Cross-line access constraints continue in the area immediately to the south of the Syrian-Turkish border, between Ra's al-Ayn and Tall Abiad, and no cross-line aid deliveries are currently conducted to this area.

16. Currently, sustained cross-line programming from within the Syrian Arab Republic assists nearly 1 million people in the north-east per month, out of 1.9 million people in need in the region, in areas both under and not under the control of the Government. Prior to the adoption of Security Council resolution [2504 \(2020\)](#) on 10 January 2020, the United Nations had provided assistance to civilians in the north-east through a combination of cross-line and cross-border operations. Cross-border operations had been conducted from Iraq, via the Ya'rubiyah border crossing, and had provided critical health supplies that could not be delivered to the north-east by other means. With the adoption of resolution [2504 \(2020\)](#), the United Nations discontinued cross-border operations into the north-east. NGOs continue to conduct cross-border operations, providing basic services, including health services, where government services or those of the local authorities are unavailable or inadequate, although operations are increasingly managed remotely, owing to closures of the border with Iraq in connection with COVID-19.

17. Efforts continue to increase cross-line operations to replace the critical medical items previously provided through the Ya'rubiyah border crossing. The process to gain approval for deliveries of medical supplies to the north-east from within the Syrian Arab Republic by land or air requires agencies to provide a request to the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and Expatriates. Once the medical supplies are imported, approval is required for each convoy and for each agency that is part of the convoy. Each request requires a load list indicating the quantity of assistance due to be dispatched to each destination. The Ministry of Health may then issue a signed facilitation letter for each agency. This approval process usually takes one week. Once the facilitation letters are received, additional approvals from the Ministry of Health and security services must be granted at the warehouses before supplies can be loaded. Further clearances are then required at the airport for shipments sent by air.

18. To date in 2020, a small number of consignments of United Nations health supplies have been delivered to the north-east from within the Syrian Arab Republic by WHO (three consignments by air), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) (one consignment by road) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) (one consignment by road). There have been no WHO road convoys, because all the necessary approvals have not been obtained. Distributions of United Nations consignments delivered to the north-east in 2020 have included some facilities in areas not under government control that had previously been supported by cross-border deliveries via Ya'rubiyah. Nevertheless, they included only 31 per cent of those facilities: of 12 hospitals previously supported by cross-border deliveries, only 6 received supplies from those consignments; of 58 primary health centres previously

supported by cross-border deliveries, only 24 received supplies from those consignments; and of 37 mobile medical units previously supported by cross-border deliveries, only 3 received supplies from those consignments. That cross-line coverage of facilities previously supported via the Ya‘rubiyah crossing largely represents the coverage recorded in 2019. Deliveries to the north-east to date have therefore not had sufficient reach to fill the gap left by the removal of the Ya‘rubiyah crossing, and multiple medical facilities previously dependent on the cross-border operation have reported acute shortages. At least seven primary health centres in rural Raqqah reported gaps in reproductive health and nutrition supplies. Other facilities reported critical items in danger of immediate stockout, including emergency medicines, anaesthetics and insulin. One primary health centre in Raqqah, which treats more than 3,900 patients each month, more than half of whom are children, reported likely closure due to loss of funds.

19. 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 Ya‘rubiyah authorization. As noted above, the United Nations is no longer able to provide medical supplies, including supplies critical to the response to COVID-19, via the Ya‘rubiyah crossing. One of the above-noted WHO consignments to the north-east in 2020 included personal protective equipment, intensive care unit beds, incubators and seven ventilators; however, the majority of medical facilities that had previously been supported by the cross-border operation were excluded from the distribution of this consignment. Supply chain challenges are one of the biggest obstacles to COVID-19 preparedness and response in the north-east. Supply options for the operation are extremely limited in the current highly competitive open market.

#### **South-east Syrian Arab Republic**

20. In the south-east, cross-line access to Rukban remains restricted, with the last humanitarian convoy to Rukban undertaken in September 2019. On 1 April 2020, the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic requested that the United Nations undertake an assessment mission to Rukban. A health assessment, alongside delivery of multisectoral assistance for 12,000 people, was planned for 20 April, but did not proceed owing to lack of agreement by the relevant parties.

## **IV. Technical functioning of United Nations cross-border operations\***

21. As with aid programming from within the Syrian Arab Republic, cross-border deliveries are conducted in line with humanitarian principles and on the basis of independent assessments of need. All United Nations operations are conducted in response to needs identified in the annual humanitarian needs overview. Individual United Nations system entities delivering humanitarian programming also regularly assess needs through their monitoring operations (see para. 33), and joint assessments are conducted, including in response to systemic shocks, such as the COVID-19 pandemic or the spike in hostilities in the north-west of the country in December 2019.

22. Based on those assessments, individual cross-border shipments are initiated by the United Nations and coordinated with humanitarian partners. The United Nations provides notification of an intended shipment to the Syrian authorities 48 hours prior to the departure of a convoy, including information on expected crossing dates, the border crossing to be used, a description of the humanitarian goods to be delivered,

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\* A detailed overview of cross-line operations is provided in the review of alternative modalities for the border crossing of Ya‘rubiyah (S/2020/139).

the number of trucks, the United Nations owner and the destination (district). Any changes in the consignments are communicated using the same process.

23. On the day of a delivery, trucks from the originating agency are loaded and sealed, and travel to the border, where the consignment is monitored by the United Nations Monitoring Mechanism (see paras. 28–31) and transferred to Syrian trucks for delivery in the Syrian Arab Republic. The World Food Programme (WFP) leads the coordination of the logistical aspects of the trans-shipment process. That process involves scheduling the cross-border deliveries, managing the trans-shipment area (including hiring labour to trans-ship from Turkish to Syrian trucks), liaising with customs agencies and ensuring information-sharing and coordination among the United Nations entities and implementing partners.

24. In Bab al-Hawa, Syrian trucks are loaded with relief items and confirmed by the United Nations Monitoring Mechanism at a separate trans-shipment area, then accompanied by the Turkish authorities, members of the WFP-led logistics team at Bab al-Hawa and Mechanism staff from the trans-shipment area to the border crossing point. In Bab al-Salam, the trans-shipment takes place at the border crossing point itself.

25. At the Bab al-Hawa and Bab al-Salam border crossings, Turkish authorities use scanners to examine each truck crossing into Turkey from the Syrian Arab Republic, in order to provide a detailed view of its contents. In Bab al-Hawa, all Syrian trucks are scanned by Turkish authorities before entering the border area from the Syrian Arab Republic. In Bab al-Salam, Syrian trucks entering Turkey are scanned at random. For additional security, when necessary, the authorities also use canine units, metal detectors and physical scans before trucks are allowed to cross the border from the Syrian Arab Republic.

26. Once across the border, the Syrian trucks deliver the relief items to the warehouse of the implementing partner in the area, as notified to the Syrian authorities. Relief items are then delivered and distributed to beneficiaries or provided to support essential services, in line with the humanitarian response plan for the Syrian Arab Republic. In some cases, items are pre-positioned to ensure that assistance can be maintained in the event of a future spike in needs or disruption in access.

27. Cross-border operations are being modified to meet the new challenges posed and requirements imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic. First, COVID-19 mitigation measures have been put in place at border crossings and trans-shipment hubs, including the staggering of consignments, modifications to loading arrangements, improvements to hygiene and the observance of social distancing. Second, cross-border shipments are also being scaled up in anticipation of potential further pandemic-related restrictions that may affect the trans-shipment process. Third, items for use in COVID-19 preparedness and response are being prioritized for trans-shipment. For instance, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has increased, prioritized and expedited trans-shipments and distributions of hygiene kits, while partners in the health and shelter sectors are working together to provide tents for isolation units.

### **United Nations Monitoring Mechanism**

28. Under Security Council resolution [2165 \(2014\)](#), the United Nations Monitoring Mechanism is mandated to monitor, with the consent of the relevant neighbouring countries of the Syrian Arab Republic, the loading of all humanitarian relief consignments of the United Nations humanitarian agencies and their implementing partners at the relevant United Nations facilities, and any subsequent opening of the consignments by the customs authorities of the relevant neighbouring countries, for

passage into the Syrian Arab Republic, with notification by the United Nations to the Syrian authorities, in order to confirm the humanitarian nature of those consignments.

29. The United Nations Monitoring Mechanism has 22 staff members and an annual budget of \$2.3 million. Mechanism staff are geographically diverse, with 14 international staff members from 11 countries. A monitoring team, consisting of a team leader, monitoring officers and support personnel, operates at each border crossing. The monitoring teams attend the loading of all consignments at United Nations facilities near the Syrian border. After confirming that the consignments are consistent with the information provided to the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic prior to the operation (as described in para. 22), the teams physically check the consignments while they are loaded onto trucks, performing random verifications. Where applicable, they use such technology as bag triers or metal detectors. All observations are recorded on a standard monitoring form for each truck. Mechanism teams accompany Turkish customs authorities during their checks of the consignments. In the case of doubt as to the contents of the delivery, a Mechanism team may request an interruption of the loading process pending clarification. To date, it has not been necessary to request such an interruption. Mechanism teams also accompany the loaded trucks to the border, to ensure there is no manipulation of the consignments or reopening of the trucks. Once the trucks have crossed the border, the Chief of the Mechanism issues a notification to the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic, confirming the crossing and the humanitarian nature of the consignment.

30. Efficiency measures have allowed United Nations Monitoring Mechanism teams to increase the number of trucks monitored in a single day, with more than 70 trucks monitored per day in April 2020, which could be temporarily increased to 100 trucks per day when needed. Those measures include streamlined logistics and customs processing, as well as improved working methods that enable staff to monitor multiple trucks simultaneously, without reducing the number of random verifications. With those efficiency measures in place, the Mechanism is considered to have reached a ceiling with regard to the numbers of trucks that could sustainably be monitored daily without compromising the thoroughness of the verification process. While a temporary scale-up is possible, a sustainable increase in daily monitoring would require the expansion of capacities, including additional monitoring staff.

31. Further strengthening the United Nations Monitoring Mechanism and ensuring that it can service the growing needs of cross-border operations into the north-west of the Syrian Arab Republic would require additional monitoring staff to support the increased volume of trans-shipments. The Mechanism could also benefit from a canine unit, to enhance monitoring capacities.

### **Monitoring cross-border deliveries**

32. Following confirmation by the United Nations Monitoring Mechanism of the humanitarian nature of relief consignments, monitoring is carried out at three levels within the Syrian Arab Republic: at warehouses upon arrival, at distribution points and after distribution to beneficiaries or facilities. Upon arrival at warehouses in the country, all items in a consignment are reviewed and checked against the waybill. That check is carried out both by the implementing partner and by third-party monitors contracted by the United Nations. Third-party monitors also track deliveries, observing direct distribution to beneficiaries or to facilities, such as schools, health facilities or child-friendly spaces. At distribution points, videos and time-stamped, geotagged photos are used to confirm delivery. Modalities for post-distribution monitoring are often stipulated in implementing partner agreements and may take the form of focus group discussions, complaint and feedback mechanisms at supported facilities and beneficiary satisfaction surveys. Many deliveries include phone numbers on or in packaging to enable direct beneficiary feedback.

33. United Nations system entities engaged in humanitarian cross-border delivery have adopted transparency and accountability systems suited to individual operational needs. The commodity tracking system of the International Organization for Migration (IOM) uses matrix bar codes to track individual items in real time, from border, to warehouse, to individual beneficiary. WHO uses an end-to-end third-party monitoring system that tracks supplies from its warehouse in Turkey, across the border, to intermediary warehouses in the north-west of the Syrian Arab Republic, to health facilities and, ultimately, to patients. Through this system, WHO monitored 100 per cent of warehouses and 33 per cent of health facilities provided with WHO supplies. WFP third-party monitors conduct, on average, 150 monitoring visits each month, and 260 on-site and post-distribution surveys. Monitors remain at distribution sites throughout the distribution process and collect photographic evidence. IOM, UNFPA, UNHCR and UNICEF also use third-party monitoring of distributions. Almost 2,000 assessments of relief operations were undertaken in 2019. There was no evidence of systemic diversion of assistance found by these checks.

34. The United Nations works with all partners to ensure due diligence in its operations. Cross-border operations are subject to accountability mechanisms between donor and partner, which may include verification that partners are humanitarian in nature, compliance with sanctions or counter-terrorism measures, external reviews and the maintenance of risk management measures. The United Nations also provides training to implementing partners and local authorities on international humanitarian law and advocates principled delivery in areas where non-State armed opposition groups operate within the Syrian Arab Republic. A code of conduct has been developed and signed by many actors in the north-west of the country, with commitments to respecting international humanitarian law, including its provisions on impartial humanitarian assistance.

## V. Observations

35. As the conflict enters its tenth year, more than 11 million people within the country require humanitarian assistance. Half a million children are chronically malnourished. Over the course of almost a decade, hundreds of thousands of Syrians have lost their lives, and over half the population have fled their homes. The COVID-19 pandemic is becoming a multiplier of humanitarian need in the Syrian Arab Republic, demanding more than ever that full, sustained and unimpeded humanitarian access be provided to all parts of the country, using all modalities possible, including scaled-up cross-line and cross-border access. Under international humanitarian law, and as laid out in multiple Security Council resolutions on the Syrian Arab Republic, including its resolutions [2139 \(2014\)](#) and [2165 \(2014\)](#), all parties to the conflict must allow and facilitate the rapid and unimpeded passage of humanitarian relief for civilians in need.

36. The cross-border operation in the Syrian Arab Republic is one of the most scrutinized modes of delivery for humanitarian assistance in the world. In the present review, I have laid out the processes in place to ensure that cross-border operations are efficient and transparent. The United Nations Headquarters Board of Inquiry into certain incidents in the north-west of the Syrian Arab Republic recognized the significant, comprehensive and efficient system of cross-border support and assistance to that region, in compliance with Security Council resolution [2165 \(2014\)](#). The United Nations will continue to do its part to assure the Council that aid to all parts of the Syrian Arab Republic is delivered, based firmly on needs, without discrimination and in line with humanitarian principles. Recommendations on further strengthening the United Nations Monitoring Mechanism to ensure that it can service

the growing needs of cross-border operations into the north-west of the country are reflected in paragraph 31.

37. Cross-line deliveries to parts of the north-east constitute a crucial component of the humanitarian response operation. The cross-line modality on its own, however, is clearly not sufficient to meet current needs. Gaps in medical supplies have widened at a time when facilities should be urgently scaling up to prepare for COVID-19. Efforts must continue to replace the supply of critical medical items previously provided through the Ya‘rubiyah border crossing. As I noted in my review of alternative modalities for the border crossing of Ya‘rubiyah (S/2020/139), a combination of more cross-border and cross-line access was required to sustain recent levels of humanitarian assistance, and preferably increase that assistance. That remains the case. I also noted in my review that, should adequate steps not be taken for cross-line deliveries to work effectively, and in the absence of consent from the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic or neighbouring countries to use border crossings into the north-east of the country, the Security Council would need to authorize the United Nations and its implementing partners to use additional crossings. Several options were identified in the review, as well as their limitations in comparison with Ya‘rubiyah.

38. In the north-west, there is no alternative that can match the scale and scope of the current cross-border operations. Efforts have been, and will continue to be, made to deliver cross-line assistance into the north-west. The 14 April 2020 approval by Syrian authorities for a first assessment mission to Darat Izzah is a positive step in that regard. No cross-line missions, however, have yet taken place. It is currently simply impossible to replicate with cross-line assistance what is being delivered through the cross-border operation. Cross-line assistance is therefore not a viable alternative, and a sustained, large-scale cross-border response will continue to be necessary to meet the enormous humanitarian needs in the north-west. That response must entail a renewal of the cross-border authorization for the use of 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.

39. In its resolution [2165 \(2014\)](#) and subsequent resolutions, the Security Council recognized the importance of ensuring that humanitarian assistance, including medical and surgical supplies, reached people in need throughout the Syrian Arab Republic through the most direct routes. That need remains as pressing today as it was in 2014. The grave risk posed by COVID-19 only heightens the imperative of using every possible means of reaching people in need. The Council has a critical role to play in support of the humanitarian efforts in the Syrian Arab Republic. I count on Council members to ensure that the United Nations is authorized to meet the needs of all who require humanitarian assistance.