

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

June 7, 2021

The Honorable Antony J. Blinken  
Secretary of State  
U.S. Department of State  
2201 C Street, N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Mr. Secretary,

We write to convey our grave concern over the prolonged suffering of the Syrian people, and our strong support for your efforts to prevent the closure of cross-border humanitarian access to Syria during the upcoming United Nations Security Council (UNSC) vote on the renewal of UNSC Resolution (UNSCR) 2533. It is our hope that UNSCR 2533 will be renewed and expanded to include re-opening the Bab Al-Salam and Yarubiyah crossings.

Ten years into the Syrian uprising, more than 13 million Syrians require humanitarian aid, approximately 12 million Syrians have been forced to flee their homes, and more than 12.4 million Syrians are experiencing food insecurity. The COVID-19 pandemic and the Assad regime's chronic economic mismanagement further exacerbate this humanitarian catastrophe.

The UNSC first authorized four border crossings points for the delivery of aid into Syria in July 2014 in response to the Assad regime's deliberate blocking of aid to civilians living in opposition held areas. The Assad regime's interference in the distribution of assistance to Syrian civilians is part of a wider effort by the regime to starve civilians into submission.

Despite the vital role of these four crossings in the delivery of humanitarian assistance, Russia, with China's support, used its position on the UNSC to shutter three of those four border crossings last year. Russia and China falsely argued that the UN's authorization of cross-border humanitarian operations into Syria is a violation of Syria's sovereignty, suggesting it be routed through regime-controlled Damascus instead. Without cross-border access, UN agencies must rely on dangerous and unreliable cross-line deliveries that the Syrian regime can obstruct at any time. As a result, only 31% of medical facilities in northeast Syria received cross-line assistance from Damascus between January and May of 2020, in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic<sup>1</sup>. Since this time, no cross-line deliveries have been made, putting even more pressure on the one remaining border crossing at Bab Al-Hawa. It is apparent that cross-line assistance is no substitute for cross border, and that the Bab Al-Salam and Yarubiyah crossings must re-open to ensure humanitarian assistance reaches Syrian civilians throughout the country.

The United States must bring its diplomatic leadership to bear to secure humanitarian access to millions of innocent Syrians. We applaud your March remarks to the UNSC in which you advocated for maintaining the crossing at Bab al Hawa and reopening those at Bab Al-Salam and Yarubiyah. Your remarks were a positive step to support the UN's objective reporting on the humanitarian needs in Syria and the existing challenges to delivering it, including regime malfeasance. Restoring the full scope of cross-border aid operations is key to mitigating further

deterioration of this humanitarian catastrophe, and helps push back against the Kremlin's efforts to undermine the UNSC's ability to uphold international peace and security.

The United States must work with likeminded partners to collectively pressure Russia and China not to use their vetoes to end the authorization for cross-border aid deliveries. This must be a concerted, whole-of-government priority. We urge you to reach out to permanent and elected members of the UNSC, NGOs working in the field, and the Syrian people. This will help build consensus around the vital importance of cross-border assistance, ensuring the Kremlin and China remain isolated in their effort to shutter cross-border access. It must be made clear in high-level diplomatic engagements that the United States sees this as an urgent moral imperative.

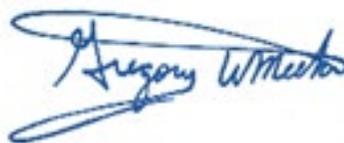
Russia's campaign to eliminate cross-border humanitarian aid deliveries is part of a larger effort to maintain eastern Mediterranean access, encourage the international community to rehabilitate the Assad regime, and open the door to reconstruction funding that will entrench the Assad regime in power and secure Russia's strategic foothold. In light of ongoing Assad regime, Russian and Iranian atrocities, we must vigorously oppose any efforts to normalize their crimes against the Syrian people. The United States must continue to emphasize a political transition and ceasefire as called for in UNSCR 2254 as the legitimate path forward for governance and Syria. We encourage you to redouble your efforts to oppose international normalization of the Assad regime and rigorously implement the Caesar Civilian Protection Act. There can be no business as usual while the murderous Assad remains in power.

We thank you for your commitment to helping the Syrian people and look forward to working together to secure humanitarian access to alleviate their suffering.

Sincerely,



Robert Menendez  
Chairman  
Senate Foreign Relations Committee



Gregory W. Meeks  
Chairman  
House Foreign Affairs Committee



James E. Risch  
Ranking Member  
Senate Foreign Relations Committee



Michael T. McCaul  
Ranking Member  
House Foreign Affairs Committee