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Human rights situations that require the Council's attention

Written statement* submitted by The Next Century Foundation, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[22 August 2022]

* Issued as received, in the language of submission only.



The Humanitarian Crisis and the Urgent Need of a Political Agreement for the Syrian Arab Republic

The Next Century Foundation acknowledges the ongoing efforts made by the United Nations regarding the Syrian Arab Republic, specifically Security Council resolution 2642 (which extends the use of the Bab al-Hawa border crossing for the delivery of humanitarian aid into the Northwest part of the Syrian Arab Republic for six months) and the completely failed but worthy mediation of the Syrian constitutional talks. Also noteworthy, is the resolution adopted on 8 July by the Human Rights Council on the human rights situation in the Syrian Arab Republic. The resolution condemned in the solidest way all acts of sexual and gender-based violence committed by all parties since the start of the conflict in 2011. It included a request for the Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic to consider updating its report on sexual and gender-based violence. The Next Century Foundation is expectant that the Commission will approach this topic at future United Nations Human Rights Council Sessions.

However, there is much that still is needed to be done and the Next Century Foundation expresses its concern, particularly regarding the humanitarian crisis, the utterly failed Syrian constitutional talks and the upcoming renewal discussion of resolution 2642 taking place in January.

On the Humanitarian Crisis

Over ten years into a massive Civil War, the Syrian Arab Republic remains in dire humanitarian crisis. According to grossly and criminally underestimated UN figures, in 2022, 14.6 million people (including 6.5 million children) need humanitarian assistance, an increase of 1.2 million compared with last year. Over 90% of the population now live in poverty and in March, the Syrian Arab Republic registered the highest rate of inflation in the past 30 years. Food and fuel prices are rising every month and reliable access to sufficient water across the north remains a major challenge.

Unreliable estimates from the UN show that more than 1.9 million people in the Northeast part of the Syrian Arab Republic requiring humanitarian assistance; including over half a million internally displaced persons. Out of 4.4 million people living in the Northwest part of the Syrian Arab Republic at least 3.1 million people are food insecure, and 1.7 million people are internally displaced persons living in camps.

Previous resolutions and Aid Distribution

The Next Century Foundation expresses its apprehension regarding the fact that there is only one border crossing open for delivering humanitarian assistance. Between 2014 and 2020, there were four border crossings (Bab al-Salam, Bab al-Hawa, Al-Ramtha and Al Yarubiyah). However, since 2020 by resolution 2533 (which approved the use of the Bab al-Hawa border crossing for the delivery of humanitarian aid into the Northwest part of the Syrian Arab Republic crossing until 10 July 2021), Bab al-Hawa is the only crossing currently open. This resolution based on a one-year mandate was extended on July 9, 2021 through Resolution 2585 for a period of six months, with possibility of a six months renewal which was activated until July of this year.

Until now, in 2022 through resolution 2585, more than 4,600 aid trucks have crossed Bab al-Hawa, constantly helping around 2.4 million people, according to claims by the UN's Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). Between July 2021 and June 2022, the total amount of aid distributed surpassed 269,000 tons, including food (71.4% of the total aid), hygiene and sanitary materials (2.85%), miscellaneous logistical equipment (22.30%) and medical aid (3.45%). The Next Century Foundation considers that it is of vital importance that the border crossing of Bab al-Hawa remains open.

Resolution 2642

On 8 July, the Russian Federation vetoed a UN Security Council resolution that would have allowed the UN to continue delivering cross-border aid to the Syrian Arab Republic for one year without the Syrian government's authorization. The reason for this veto was that it called for a 12-month reauthorisation of the mandate, whereas the Russian Federation wanted a six-month reauthorisation that would require a Council resolution for an additional six-month extension. On 12 July, after the expiration of resolution 2585 (which occurred on the 10th July), Security Council members accepted the Russian Federation's demand and adopted resolution 2642, reauthorizing the cross-border humanitarian aid mechanism in the Syrian Arab Republic for six months until 10 January 2023. Meaning that a separate resolution will be necessary in January, to extend the mandate for an additional six months until 10 July 2023.

According to international humanitarian law, no party to a conflict may arbitrarily refuse proposals to carry out aid operations that are impartial and humanitarian in nature, including cross-border humanitarian assistance. The Next Century Foundation understands and appreciates the Russian Federation's position regarding the cross-border mechanism. Nonetheless, we are deeply concerned regarding the Russian veto as it is unhelpful to the current situation. The negotiations that will take place in January can suffer delays and if so, it could mean that the 2.4 million people assisted by the mechanism may be without assistance in the harsh winter month of January, while the extension of the mechanism is debated.

UN mediated talks

An additional matter of concern for the Next Century Foundation is the postponing of the meeting of the Syrian Constitutional Committee. The ninth round of meetings of the Constitutional Committee, were originally planned to occur between 25 and 29 July in Geneva. However, the meeting was postponed after the Russian Federation raised issues over the location because it does not, perhaps understandably, view the Swiss government as an impartial actor. Considering that previous negotiations made very slight progress; these upcoming talks were of great importance. The Russian reservations should therefore be accommodated.

Recommendations

With the uncertainty of future negotiations for the aid mechanism in January, The Next Century Foundation appeals for all parties of the Council to approve a one-year mandate in upcoming sessions and for the mandate to be extended to the Northeast part of the Syrian Arab Republic and not only to the Northwest part of the Syrian Arab Republic, as there are UN estimates of more than 1.9 million people in need in that region. On the Syrian Constitutional Talks, The Next Century Foundation appeals for all parties involved to reach an agreement in upcoming meetings, in order to find a political solution for the conflict, in accordance with resolution 2254 (adopted in 2015, which calls for a ceasefire and political settlement in the Syrian Arab Republic).
