Today, United Nations Security Council permanent members China and Russia vetoed a draft resolution that would ensure continued provision of humanitarian aid across the Syrian border without the approval of the Syrian government. Though the cross-border aid mechanism had been authorized annually since 2014, in January 2020, it was reduced in scope and renewed for only six months due to pressure from China and Russia, an ally of the Syrian government.

Today, the two again obstructed the continuation of the cross-border aid mechanism, with Russia insufficiently proposing only one crossing point at Bab Al-Hawa for just six months instead. The move demonstrates blatant disregard for humanitarian principles and the ongoing prioritization of political objectives over human lives. China and Russia were the only two members of the UN Security Council to oppose the renewal of the resolution today.

**Rayan Koteiche**, Middle East and North Africa researcher for Physicians for Human Rights, said in response to the vote:
“The cross-border aid mechanism is the most viable channel to deliver aid to millions of Syrians in need. Without it, civilians who rely on lifesaving assistance will be at the mercy of the Syrian government, with whom rests the authority to approve crossline deliveries – and which has engaged in war crimes and crimes against humanity that have created and deepened the humanitarian crisis in Syria.

“Today, we saw yet another example of the cynicism with which the Russians and their allies on the United Nations Security Council deal with one of the most severe humanitarian crises of our time. This is the fifteenth veto by the Russian Federation and the ninth by China on Syria. If the Russian government succeeds in its efforts to dismantle the cross-border aid mechanism, there will be devastating consequences for millions of women, children, and men who rely on humanitarian aid to stay alive.

“With massive shortages in medical equipment and supplies and the expanding threat of the spread of COVID-19, it is critical that the UN Security Council ensure that the cross-border mechanism continues with two crossings into northwest Syria and reauthorize the crossing into northeast Syria, so that aid can reach the four million Syrians who rely on it in the most principled and effective manner.”

Just last week, Susannah Sirkin, director of policy and senior advisor at Physicians for Human Rights, briefed the UN Security Council on the humanitarian situation in Syria and the necessity of the continuation of the cross-border mechanism. In July of 2019, Sirkin briefed the Security Council on attacks on health care in Syria; following that briefing, members of the Security Council asked Secretary-General António Guterres to investigate attacks on humanitarian facilities in northwestern Syria.

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PHR has developed and maintains the following resources documenting the impact of the Syrian conflict on the country’s health care infrastructure:

- Interactive Map: Illegal Attacks on Health Care in Syria
  - Findings
Facts and data: Medical Personnel Targeted in Syria

Factsheet: The Syrian Conflict: Eight Years of Devastation and Destruction of the Health System


Case Studies: Specific incidents of attacks on health care facilities and personnel in Syria

PHR blog archive concerning Syria

Physicians for Human Rights (PHR) is a New York-based advocacy organization that uses science and medicine to prevent mass atrocities and severe human rights violations. Learn more here.

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