

Syria: Food Security Can Only be Achieved Through Independent, Impartial and Equal Humanitarian Relief



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*In response to US special envoy statement on the global food crisis, SHAR for
Development and Syrians for Truth and Justice wish to offer
recommendations*

In the midst of a global food crisis, [SHAR For Development](#) and Syrians for Truth and Justice welcome special envoy Fowler's efforts towards food security, through coordinated and global response to the ongoing emergency.¹ We wish to support him in his global work by providing him with a summary on the Syrian crisis and recommendations on efficient, impartial and equal humanitarian access.

Since the beginning of 2022, ongoing conflicts and humanitarian situations have threatened global food security, including in Syria. In the midst of the largest cost of living crisis of the 21st century, the Syrian people's living condition is taking a toll as low income and instability heightened threats on food security.

In Northeast Syria, more than 90% of the population lives under the poverty line, facing water and food shortages. In 2021, the prevalence of acute food insecurity was up to more than 60% in some areas² Issues like the ever-increasing dependence to imports, obstacles to cross-border supplies, and the depreciation of the Syrian currency have led to rising costs of food, resulting in prices which are often beyond households' purchasing power. Using trends from the first four months of 2022, it is expected that the WFP minimum food basket price will increase up to 83% in 2022³

The external shocks provoked by the pandemic of Covid-19 and the Russian invasion of Ukraine further disrupted supply chains while Caesar law's implementation contributed to the fuel shortages⁴. The Global Crisis Response Group on food, Energy and Finance second brief on the global impact of the war in Ukraine⁵ stated that « In one way or another, everyone is exposed to the shock waves of the war. The level of exposure of a country and its ability to deal with the shock determine a country's vulnerability » making it increasingly difficult to mitigate the food, energy and financial crisis. Thus, the extent of the crisis as well as the interdependence of food systems demand a global effort towards food security as "piece-meal approaches will not work"⁶. In face of this bleak situation and the politicization of the conflict, humanitarian aid is more than ever needed in Syria. The recent developments in Ukraine and the stalemate of the cross-border mechanism give a very bleak vision of Syria's future. The only remaining cross-border mechanism, Bal-al-Hawa has been

¹ US special envoy on global food security Cary Fowler's statement on July 18 during the High-Level Special Event the President of the UN General Assembly and the Committee on World Food Security are convening entitled "Time to Act Together on Coordinating Policy Responses to the Global Food Security Crisis."

² see : *Syria Economic Monitor: Lost Generation of Syrians | Knowledge for policy*. (n.d.). Retrieved 19 July 2022, from https://knowledge4policy.ec.europa.eu/publication/syria-economic-monitor-lost-generation-syrians_en

³ *ibid.*

⁴ United Nations, Human Rights Council, Report of the Special Rapporteur on the negative impact of unilateral coercive measures on the enjoyment of human rights on his mission to the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/39/54/Add.2), September 2018.

See: <https://syriaaccountability.org/syrian-organizations-respond-to-the-un-special-rapporteur-on-unilateral-coercive-measures/>

⁵ See : *Global Crisis Response Group on Food, Energy and Finance Brief No.2: Global impact of the war in Ukraine - Billions of people face the greatest cost-of-living crisis in a generation - World | ReliefWeb*. (n.d.). Retrieved 19 July 2022, from <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/global-crisis-response-group-food-energy-and-finance-brief-no2-global-impact-war-ukraine-billions-people-face-greatest-cost-living-crisis-generation>

⁶ *ibid.*

temporary extended for another six months after a series of difficult negotiation in July 2022. Ensuring stable and sufficient cross-border operations is a « moral imperative »⁷ according to UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres. As it is, this resolution is not meeting the requirements for ensuring humanitarian relief for the vulnerable people of Syria, as stated by the United States Representative to the UN, Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield « It is a resolution that benefits the Syrian regime more than it benefits the people of Syria ».

Indeed, as it is, maintaining only one cross-border crossing point in Bab al-Hawa enable the misuse of humanitarian aid by the Syrian government⁸ and deprive vulnerable communities, primarily internally displaced persons, from accessing essential relief⁹. Russia has been locking the cross-border's access in areas the Syrian government does not control¹⁰. As Russia and Ukraine represent 1/4 of global grain exports, the war in Ukraine and blockade of the Black Sea ports is provoking a shortage of wheat supplies all over the region. Furthermore, practices of looted crops being sold contribute to the food and agricultural market volatility and deprive people from their right to food¹¹. While Syria is dependent on Russian's wheat¹², in late 2021 the latter suspended an export agreement amounting to 1 million tons of wheat due to the global rising of wheat's prices. Indeed as it is, Syria's agricultural production is not self-sufficient.

After a decade of war and destruction, the harvests and livestock productions are taking a toll. The FAO reported for the whole of Syria that irrigated wheat productivity halved from 3.2 tonnes per hectare (t/ha) in 2020 to 1.7 t/ha in 2021¹³. Meanwhile, rain-fed wheat yields reduced by 2/3¹⁴, going down to zero in Al-Hasakeh and Al-Raqqa governorates. Total yields were estimated at one million tonnes in 2020, just over 1/3 of what was produced the year before. In 2021, the wheat productivity rate was very low compared to the year before, with less than 400.000 tons and a production rate of 200 to 250 kg per dunum¹⁵. STJ is welcoming the Special envoy's stance on closing the global fertilizer gap as the situation in Syria is aggravated by the lack of fertilizers due to trade restrictions and the inability to cover the expense and lack of attention to the fertility of the land¹⁶. As Northeastern

⁷ <https://news.un.org/en/story/2022/06/1120862>

⁸ <https://stj-sy.org/en/northeastern-syria-government-agencies-withhold-tens-of-thousands-of-un-aid-baskets/>

⁹ <https://syriaaccountability.org/updates/2019/08/01/documents-obtained-by-sjac-show-role-of-syrian-intelligence-in-directing-humanitarian-aid/>

¹⁰ <https://syriaaccountability.org/updates/2021/06/17/ngos-are-not-prepared-to-fill-the-gap-if-un-votes-to-end-cross-border-aid/>

¹¹ see: <https://stj-sy.org/en/stj-expresses-concerns-about-threats-on-food-security/>

¹² In 2021, the Syrian government imported 1.5 million tonnes of wheat. See : Syria Economic Monitor: Lost Generation of Syrians | Knowledge for policy. (n.d.). Retrieved 19 July 2022, from https://knowledge4policy.ec.europa.eu/publication/syria-economic-monitor-lost-generation-syrians_en

¹³ See : FAO. 2021. Special report: 2021 FAO Crop and Food Supply Assessment Mission to the Syrian Arab Republic – December 2021. Rome. <https://doi.org/10.4060/cb8039en>

¹⁴ From 1.4 t/ha to 0.4 t/ha

¹⁵ See: *Food Security in NES*. (n.d.). Shar-Dev. Retrieved 20 July 2022, from <https://shar-dev.org/en/blog/Food-Security-in-NES>

¹⁶ See: *Food Security in NES*. (n.d.). Shar-Dev. Retrieved 20 July 2022, from <https://shar-dev.org/en/blog/Food-Security-in-NES>

Syria is heavily dependent on electric generated by dams in the Euphrates River, the historic decrease in water flow¹⁷ is also leading to shortages of electric generation. Documented by STJ¹⁸, Turkey as been disrupting Aluk water pumping station for political and military gains, provoking water cuts in Ras al Ayn/Serê Kaniyê and further aggravating water stress in the region. This discriminated access to water as been denounced by 89 Syrian organizations in August 2020¹⁹ demanding accountability. Indeed, in August 2022, the station's water has been cut off from Hasaka for more than 15 days, while being the only and main source of drinking water for about one million people²⁰. This is the 27th time that Turkey has cut off the water of the Allouk station, in Serêkaniyê/Ras al-Ain, from the city of Hasakah, since 2019²¹.

As the conflict continues after more than a decade of war, the humanitarian situation is the upmost issue that the international community needs to tackle. Despite growing needs, reported humanitarian donor funding for Syria in 2021 reached its lowest level since 2014²². Some 6.4 billion euros was pledge during the 6th Brussels Conference held in May 2022 falling short of the 9.3 billion euros requirements made by the UN and NGOs²³. Directly impacting the relief capacity, due to financial constraints and rising global food prices, the WFP announced that it would further scale down a number of items in its monthly emergency food baskets to Northwest Syria in May 2022. Civilians access to basic needs and services such as irrigation networks and restoring education and public health facilities is part of a sustainable development pursuant to restore people's livelihoods and ability to be, eventually, self-sufficient. Politicization and diversion of humanitarian relief as well as structural weaknesses of the Syrian agricultural production showcase the necessity of further reflecting on the extent and the scope of the global answer to hunger in Syria. Pursuant to the VI Brussels conference and the emphasis on the humanitarian crisis in Syria and the will of finding long term, sustainable solutions to the needs of the Syrian people, we offer to the special envoy on food security the following recommendations:

1. In the short-term, the special envoy on food security should work towards securing the cross-border mechanism, keeping Bab al Hawa open and reactivate aid-delivery through Yaroubiya, Bab al Salameh and al Ramtha, as it is vital to properly provide full, safe and unhindered access to humanitarian relief throughout the Syrian territory. While the short term solution is essential to provide relief for the Syrian

¹⁷ See: *Food Security in NES*. (n.d.). Shar-Dev. Retrieved 20 July 2022, from <https://shar-dev.org/en/blog/Food-Security-in-NES>

¹⁸ <https://stj-sy.org/en/timeline-of-the-disruptions-series-of-aluk-water-pumping-station-north-east-syria/>

¹⁹ <https://stj-sy.org/en/89-organizations-denounce-turkeys-repeated-water-cut-to-hundreds-of-thousands-of-people-in-syrias-north-east/>

²⁰ <https://npasyria.com/119642/>

²¹ *ibid.*

²² *Syria Economic Monitor: Lost Generation of Syrians | Knowledge for policy*. (n.d.). Retrieved 19 July 2022, from https://knowledge4policy.ec.europa.eu/publication/syria-economic-monitor-lost-generation-syrians_en

²³ *Syria Economic Monitor: Lost Generation of Syrians | Knowledge for policy*. (n.d.). Retrieved 19 July 2022, from https://knowledge4policy.ec.europa.eu/publication/syria-economic-monitor-lost-generation-syrians_en

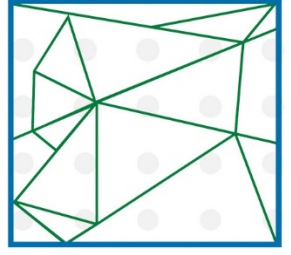
population, long-term solutions must be implemented to ensure Syria's self-sufficiency in the long run. Facilitating humanitarian access can only be efficient by applying pressure to assign aid delivery to impartial and neutral actors while curtailing the Syrian Government control in order to ensure the independence of the humanitarian issue and relief of political polarization.

2. The restoration of water security can only take place if access to drinking water, particularly from Aluk, is no longer used in a discriminatory manner or for political and military purposes. The Special Envoy on Food Security must ensure the independent and impartial management and monitoring of the Aluk water pumping station.

3. Humanitarian aid must be developed to meet the needs of the population in a sustainable way. Early humanitarian assistance must be developed to prevent hunger in the long run. Civil society organizations and humanitarian actors must be included as a part of a multi-layer and longer term funding that respond to urgent needs as well as displaying a groundwork for structural solutions. Funding NGO's and local civil society networks to help educate and sharing agricultural skills among the population. Support farmers by securing basic needs, including wheat cultivation operations and closing the fertilizers gap.

4. The US special envoy on global food security must push for the support of the entire wheat value chain including restoring facilities link to production. The water shortage implies a need of innovative irrigation systems, such as sprinkler system. The food crisis must be mitigated by improving the farmers and agricultural system resilience through enhancing the quality of soil and yields. UN member states must work conjointly to provide technical training to restore the agricultural exploitation in the region.

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About Us:

Syrians for Truth and Justice (STJ) is a nonprofit, nongovernmental organization monitoring human rights violations in Syria. Founded in 2015, STJ has been based in France since 2019.

STJ is an impartial and independent Syrian human rights organization operating across Syria. Our network of field researchers monitor and report human rights violations occurring on the ground in Syria, while our international team of human rights experts, lawyers, and journalists gather evidence, examine emerging patterns of violations, and analyze how violations break domestic Syrian and international law.

We are committed to documenting violations of human rights committed by all parties in the Syrian conflict and elevating the voices of all Syrians victimized by human rights violations, regardless of their ethnicity, religion, political affiliation, class, and/or gender. Our commitment to human rights monitoring is founded on the idea that professional human rights documentation meeting international standards is the first step to uncovering the truth and achieving justice in Syria.



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