

I. Addressing the Humanitarian Crisis in Syria

Introduction

In 2010 and 2011, pro-democracy protests and demonstrations, known as the Arab Spring, spread throughout the Middle East and North Africa (MENA).¹ The largest of the protests began in Tunisia in response to a protestor's self-immolation in protest of police abuse and ill-treatment by the government.² The protest sparked the Jasmine Revolution, giving credence to protests and power of people across the MENA region.³ After Tunisia, protests spread to Egypt, Yemen, and other Member States, transforming into the Arab Spring.⁴ Most protests were met with violent retaliation by Member States' police forces.⁵ In March 2011, the Arab Spring reached the Republic of Syria.⁷ Wide-spread protests and demonstrations erupted in support for youth arrested by Syrian police forces for anti-government graffiti.⁸ In retaliation, the Syrian government began repressing anti-government rhetoric and demonstrations, raising tensions across the Member State.⁹ Conflicts continued to escalate, leading to the Syrian Civil War and one of the largest refugee crises in the world.¹⁰

The Syrian Civil War (2011-present)

Over the course of the last 12 years, the Syrian Civil War has developed into a multi-sided conflict consisting of Syria, a faction of al-Qaeda, the Islamic State of the Levant (ISIL), and multiple factions claiming to be the representative government of the Syrian people.¹¹ The conflict began as a result of direct punishment and suppression of national protests.¹² Syrian President Bashar al-Assad deployed military forces in response to protests.¹³ As the civil war continued, opposition forces and organizations took advantage of the conflict.¹⁴ Many of the opposition forces, specifically al-Qaeda and other terrorist organizations, gained Syrian recruits by achieving more military success in the face of the existing power vacuums and through their sheer brutality.¹⁵ Moreover, much of the success by these groups have been attributed to President Assad, as he released hundreds of Islamist militants in 2011 in an effort to discredit the organizations.¹⁶ Internationally, other Member States' involvement has transformed the war to be a battleground of interests, as many Member States expressed opposition to the current Syrian government and President Assad, while others are in support for Assad's government.¹⁷ The conflict has been marked by collapsing peace talks, negotiations, and ceasefires, while the Syrian people are left in dire need of humanitarian aid and relief.¹⁸

¹ "Syria," Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, February 28, 2023, <https://www.global2p.org/countries/syria/>, (accessed May 18, 2023).

² "Mohamed Bouazizi - 2011, 'Arab Spring', Tunisia," European Parliament, 2020, <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/sakharovprize/en/mohamed-bouazizi-2011-arab-spring-tunisi/products-details/20200331CAN54202>, (accessed May 18, 2023).

³ "Mohamed Bouazizi - 2011, 'Arab Spring', Tunisia," European Parliament.

⁴ Sudarsan Raghavan, "Inspired by Tunisia and Egypt, Yemenis join in anti-government protests," Washington Post, January 27, 2011, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2011/01/27/AR2011012702081.html>, (accessed May 18, 2023).

⁵ Julian Borger, "Tunisian President vows to punish rioters after worst unrest in a decade," The Guardian, December 29, 2010, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/dec/29/tunisian-president-vows-punish-rioters>, (accessed June 26, 2023).

⁶ Sudarsan Raghavan, "Inspired by Tunisia and Egypt, Yemenis join in anti-government protests."

⁷ "Syria," Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect.

⁸ Hugh Macleod, "Syria: How it all began," GlobalPost, April 23, 2011, <https://theworld.org/dispatch/news/regions/middle-east/110423/syria-assad-protests-daraa>, (accessed June 26, 2023).

⁹ "Syria," Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect.

¹⁰ "Syria," Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect.

¹¹ Zachary Laub, "Syria's Civil War: The Descent into Horror," *Council on Foreign Relations*, February 14, 2023, <https://www.cfr.org/article/syrias-civil-war>, (accessed June 26, 2023).

¹² Laub, "Syria's Civil War...", February 14, 2023.

¹³ Laub, "Syria's Civil War...", February 14, 2023.

¹⁴ Laub, "Syria's Civil War...", February 14, 2023.

¹⁵ Laub, "Syria's Civil War...", February 14, 2023.

¹⁶ Laub, "Syria's Civil War...", February 14, 2023.

¹⁷ Laub, "Syria's Civil War...", February 14, 2023.

¹⁸ Laub, "Syria's Civil War...", February 14, 2023.

Starting in 2013, the Syrian government and ISIL combatants deployed chemical weapons attacks against civilian populations.¹⁹ After numerous allegations of chemical weapon use, the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) created the Fact-Finding Mission (FFM) in Syria.²⁰ The internal investigation team was mandated to determine if chemical weapons were being used in Syria, and to what extent.²¹ The FFM collected and analyzed physical samples, interviewed affected people, and gathered and reviewed related documentation to specific incidents to confirm the use of chemical weapons.²² According to the OPCW and the FFM, the Syrian government had used chemical weapons, typically deployed from aircraft, to repress opposition forces, killing thousands of civilians.²³ Though the Syrian Armed Forces agreed to have the chemical weapons destroyed in 2013, OPCW has stated there has been continued use and stockpiling of weapons as late as 2021.²⁴ The continued stockpiling and use of chemical weapons violates both the joint agreement with the United Nations (UN) and the OPCW, and violates the Chemical Weapons Convention.²⁵

As a result of the Syrian Civil War, millions of civilians have been internally displaced and need humanitarian assistance.²⁶ However, in recent years, flooding and strong winds have plagued the region, leaving internally displaced individuals without make-shift homes.²⁷ Syria is also experiencing a refugee crisis, where refugees have fled into neighboring Member States.²⁸ Many of the Member States Syrian refugees are entering are also either experiencing conflict or are in need of humanitarian assistance.²⁹ As a result, Syrian refugees generally have to continue to survive in extremely underfunded relief systems.³⁰ The total amount of refugees is estimated to be over 5.4 million in neighboring Member States as of 2023.³¹ In 2022, the World Bank reported that 70 percent of Syrian refugees were living in poverty and were at an increased risk of child labor, gender-based violations, COVID-19, and cholera.³² Around 47 percent of these refugees are under eighteen, and nearly a third do not have access to education.³³

United Nations Supervision Mission in Syria (UNSMIS)

The United Nations Supervision Mission in Syria (UNSMIS) was established in 2012 by S/RES/2043.³⁴ UNSMIS was mandated by the UN Security Council (UNSC) for 90 days to monitor the cessation of armed conflict and to implement the six-point proposal of the Joint Special Envoy of the UN and the League of Arab States to end the Syrian conflict.³⁵ The Envoy's six-point proposal was a collaborative effort between the League of Arab State and the UN, committed to by the Syrian Government on March 27, 2012.³⁶ Annexed to S/RES/2042, the proposal

¹⁹ Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, *Third Report by the OPCW Investigation And Identification Team Pursuant To Paragraph 10 Of Decision C-Ss-4/Dec.3 "Addressing The Threat From Chemical Weapons Use" Douma (Syrian Arab Republic) – 7 April 2018, S/2125/2023, January 27, 2023, <https://www.opcw.org/sites/default/files/documents/2023/01/s-2125-2023%28e%29.pdf>.*

²⁰ "Fact-Finding Mission," *Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons*, <https://www.opcw.org/fact-finding-mission> (accessed July 23, 2023).

²¹ "Fact-Finding Mission," *Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons*.

²² "Fact-Finding Mission," *Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons*.

²³ Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, *Third Report by the OPCW Investigation and Identification Team...*

²⁴ Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, *Third Report by the OPCW Investigation and Identification Team...*

²⁵ Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, *Third Report by the OPCW Investigation and Identification Team...*

²⁶ "Syria," Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect.

²⁷ "Syria," Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect.

²⁸ "Syria Refugee Crisis Explained," USA for United Nations Refugee Agency, March 14, 2023, <https://www.unrefugees.org/news/syria-refugee-crisis-explained/>, (accessed May 18, 2023).

²⁹ "Syria Situation," *United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees Global Focus*, <https://reporting.unhcr.org/operational/situations/syria-situation>, (accessed June 26, 2023)

³⁰ "Syria Situation," *United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees Global Focus*.

³¹ "Syria Situation," *United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees Global Focus*,

³² "Syria Refugee Crisis Explained," USA for United Nations Refugee Agency.

³³ "Syria Refugee Crisis Explained," USA for United Nations Refugee Agency.

³⁴ United Nations Security Council, *Resolution 2043, S/RES/2043, April 21, 2012, <https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/Syria%20SRES%202043.pdf>.*

³⁵ United Nations Security Council, *Resolution 2043*.

³⁶ "Text of Annan's six-point peace plan for Syria," *Reuters*, April 4, 2012, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-syria-ceasefire-idUSBRE8330HJ20120404>, (accessed June 27, 2023).

outlines the foundation for the UN's participation within the Syrian Civil War and UNSMIS.³⁷ The six-points aim for the mission and process to be Syrian-led, to enact a supervised cessation of armed conflict, maintain the provision of humanitarian aid, release arbitrarily detained persons, and ensure freedom of movement for journalists and the freedom of association through peaceful protest.³⁸ Fully operational in May 2012, UNSMIS deployed 278 military observers and 121 civilian staff split between Damascus and regional observation sites.³⁹ Working towards the cessation of conflict, UNSMIS conducted patrols in population centers for information gathering and to defuse escalated tensions.⁴⁰ UNSMIS focused on interactions with local populations and government officials to build a network of understanding to establish stability.⁴¹

However, much of the efforts by the UNSMIS were hampered by rising tensions and hostility on the ground.⁴² As conflicts grew, observers' access to certain locations became more restricted, and direct hostility towards observers grew.⁴³ Rising expectations that the presence of the UN would directly lead to the cessation of conflict was met with worsening conditions, seen in increasing hostility experienced by UN personnel as the mission continued.⁴⁴ In June 2012, UNSMIS was suspended due to the rise of armed conflict, and eventually terminated in July 2012, as the conditions for the extension of the mission was not met in the 90-day period.⁴⁵ Despite the termination of UNSMIS, the UNSC continues to discuss Syria.⁴⁶ In response to the necessity of humanitarian aid and continued human rights violations, the UNSC implemented S/RES/2164 in 2014.⁴⁷ The resolution authorized the use for humanitarian aid at the Bab al-Salam, Bab al-Hawa, Al Yarubiyah and Al-Ramtha border crossings.⁴⁸

Recent Developments and Conclusion

Little to no political gains have been made in recent years to mend the conflict and promote relief in the Member State.⁴⁹ The UN projects 15.3 million people, or 70 percent of the Syrian population, will require humanitarian aid in 2023.⁵⁰ As of June 2023, Bab al-Hawa is one of the last cross-border zones near Idlib, a rebel-controlled territory.⁵¹ The Bab al-Hawa Crossing provides four million people with critical aid.⁵² In 2022, over 4600 trucks with aid passed through the crossing.⁵³ To let continued humanitarian aid into Syria, UNSC has been reconvening every six months to extend the Bab al-Hawa cross-border humanitarian aid mechanism in Syria.⁵⁴ S/RES/2642 (2022) authorized the cross-border humanitarian aid mechanism until January 2023.⁵⁵ S/RES/2672 (2023) extended

³⁷ United Nations Security Council, *Annex to Resolution 2042*, S/RES/2042, April 14, 2012, https://peacemaker.un.org/sites/peacemaker.un.org/files/SY_120414_SixPointPlan.pdf.

³⁸ United Nations Security Council, *Annex to Resolution 2042*.

³⁹ "UNSMIS Background," *United Nations Supervision Mission in Syria*, <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/mission/past/unsmis/background.shtml>, (accessed June 27, 2023)

⁴⁰ "UNSMIS Background," *United Nations Supervision Mission in Syria*.

⁴¹ "UNSMIS Background," *United Nations Supervision Mission in Syria*.

⁴² "UNSMIS Background," *United Nations Supervision Mission in Syria*.

⁴³ "UNSMIS Background," *United Nations Supervision Mission in Syria*.

⁴⁴ "UNSMIS Background," *United Nations Supervision Mission in Syria*.

⁴⁵ United Nations Supervision Mission in Syria, "UNSMIS Mandate," United Nations, 2023, <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/mission/past/unsmis/mandate.shtml>, (accessed May 18, 2023).

⁴⁶ "Syria," *Security Council Report*, <https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/syria/> (accessed July 24, 2023)

⁴⁷ United Nations Security Council, *Resolution 2164*, S/RES/2164, July 14, 2014, <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N14/465/91/PDF/N1446591.pdf?OpenElement>

⁴⁸ United Nations Security Council, *Resolution 2164*.

⁴⁹ "Syria," Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, February 28, 2023, <https://www.globalr2p.org/countries/syria/>, (accessed May 18, 2023).

⁵⁰ "Syria," Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect.

⁵¹ Natasha Hall, "The Implications of the UN Cross-Border Vote in Syria," Center for Strategic and International Studies, June 4, 2021, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/implications-un-cross-border-vote-syria>, (accessed May 19, 2023).

⁵² Natasha Hall, "The Implications of the UN Cross-Border Vote in Syria."

⁵³ Emily Calton O'Keefe, "Millions At Risk In Northwest Syria As The Last Aid Corridor Into The Region May Soon Be Forced To Close," The Organization for World Peace, August 18, 2022, <https://theowp.org/millions-at-risk-in-northwest-syria-as-the-last-aid-corridor-into-the-region-may-soon-be-forced-to-close/>, (accessed May 19, 2023).

⁵⁴ United Nations Security Council, *Resolution 2642*, S/RES/2642, July 12, 2022, <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N22/421/71/PDF/N2242171.pdf?OpenElement>.

⁵⁵ United Nations Security Council, *Resolution 2642*.

humanitarian aid again until July 2023.⁵⁶ UNSC plans to meet throughout 2023 to discuss the continued use of chemical weapons in the Member State, which further exacerbates the humanitarian crisis.⁵⁷

On February 6, 2023, an earthquake measured at a 7.8 magnitude struck the border between Syria and Türkiye, and was soon followed by a 7.5 earthquake, causing an unprecedented humanitarian crisis.⁵⁸ In Syria, approximately 9,100 buildings have been destroyed leaving thousands of people homeless.⁵⁹ The earthquakes killed approximately 6,000 people and injured more than 12,000 in Syria.⁶⁰ Along with the earthquake and the widespread destruction of infrastructure, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) reported a cholera outbreak of around 106,000 cases and 109 deaths as of March 2023.⁶¹ Prior to the earthquakes in February, there was a potential forced closure of the Bab al-Hawa.⁶² Closing the crossing would leave millions at risk of starvation.⁶³ However, in the face of the unprecedented crisis in Syria and neighboring Member States, the Bab al-Salam and al Ra'ee crossings have both been temporarily opened by the Syrian government until August 13, 2023.⁶⁴ The crossing openings have allowed the UN and other organizations to increase required humanitarian assistance into Syria.⁶⁵ Between February and April 2023, an additional 325 total aid trucks passed through the two new openings.⁶⁶ On July 11, 2023 the UNSC voted on two draft resolutions considering the reauthorization for the continued opening of the Bab al-Hawa crossing.⁶⁷ After the first draft resolution (S/2023/506) to reauthorize the crossing was vetoed, and after Russia's draft resolution (S/2023/507) failed to receive the required votes to pass, the UNSC failed to reauthorize the opening of the Bab al-Hawa crossing.⁶⁸

On July 13, 2023, the Syrian government announced they would allow the continued humanitarian use of the Bab al-Hawa crossing for six months on two conditions: the UN does not communicate with opposition groups, and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the Syrian Arab Red Crescent (SARC) facilitate humanitarian aid provision in opposition-controlled areas in Northwest Syria.⁶⁹ Both conditions were announced to be unacceptable by OCHA.⁷⁰ In August 2023, the UN and Syria announced an agreement for the use of the Bab al-Salam and Al Ra'ee border crossings until November 13, 2023 and the Bab al-Hawa crossing until February 1,

⁵⁶ United Nations Security Council, *Resolution 2672*, S/RES/2672, January 9, 2023, <https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/SRES2672.pdf>.

⁵⁷ "United Nations Security Council January 2023 Monthly Forecast," Security Council Report, December 29, 2022, <https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/monthly-forecast/2023-01/syria-51.php>, (accessed May 19, 2023).

⁵⁸ "UNDP's Response: Türkiye-Syria Earthquakes," *United Nations Development Programme*, <https://www.undp.org/turkiye-syria-earthquakes> (accessed June 26, 2023).

⁵⁹ "UNDP's Response: Türkiye-Syria Earthquakes," *United Nations Development Programme*.

⁶⁰ "Earthquake Response In Syria," Report No. 8, United Nations Children's Fund, 2023, <https://reliefweb.int/attachments/3dbbd8aa-26cb-4759-9f61-2de91f437705/UNICEF%20Syria%20Humanitarian%20Situation%20Report%20No.%208%20%28Earthquake%29%20-%2029%20March-11%20April%202023.pdf>, (accessed May 19, 2023).

⁶¹ "Earthquake Response In Syria," Report No. 8, United Nations Children's Fund.

⁶² Natasha Hall, "The Implications of the UN Cross-Border Vote in Syria."

⁶³ Natasha Hall, "The Implications of the UN Cross-Border Vote in Syria," Center for Strategic and International Studies, June 4, 2021, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/implications-un-cross-border-vote-syria>, (accessed May 19, 2023).

⁶⁴ "United Nations Security Council May Monthly Forecast," Security Council Report, April 30, 2023, <https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/monthly-forecast/2023-05/syria-55.php>, (accessed May 19, 2023).

⁶⁵ "Northwest Syria Earthquake Response Cross Border Operation from Türkiye to Northwest Syria," United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, May 19, 2023, <https://app.powerbi.com/view?r=eyJrIjoibDBjZWY5NTctNGZjMjY0MDYwLThhMDMtNzY4ZDQ4NjMwMGZlIiwidCI6IjBmOWUzNWRLTU0NGYtNGY2MCIzGNjLTViYTQxNmU2ZGM3MCIslmMiOjh9>, (accessed May 19, 2023).

⁶⁶ "Northwest Syria Earthquake Response Cross Border Operation from Türkiye to Northwest Syria," United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.

⁶⁷ "Syria: Private Meeting and Closed Consultations," *Security Council Report*, <https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/whatsinblue/2023/07/syria-private-meeting-and-closed-consultations-2.php> (accessed July 24, 2023)

⁶⁸ "Syria: Private Meeting and Closed Consultations," *Security Council Report*.

⁶⁹ "Syria: Private Meeting and Closed Consultations," *Security Council Report*.

⁷⁰ "Syria: Private Meeting and Closed Consultations," *Security Council Report*.

2024.⁷¹ The UN and Syria also came to an agreement allowing the use of the Sarmada and Saraqib domestic crossings until February 1, 2024.⁷² However, without the reauthorization of the UNSC resolution, all three previous authorized crossings are open only at the discretion of the Syrian government and are liable to close at any moment.⁷³ Additionally, as of September 7, 2023, all efforts by the OPCW to continue consultations with Syria have been unsuccessful.⁷⁴ The OPCW Technical Secretariat has yet to receive any documents or declarations, preventing the OPCW from closing Syria's chemical weapons file.⁷⁵

⁷¹ "Statement attributable to the Spokesperson for the Secretary-General - on Syria," *United Nations*, August 8, 2023, <https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/statement/2023-08-08/statement-attributable-the-spokesperson-for-the-secretary-general-%E2%80%93-syria>, (accessed September 20, 2023).

⁷² "Statement attributable to the Spokesperson for the Secretary-General - on Syria," *United Nations*.

⁷³ "In Hindsight: The Demise of the Syria Cross-border Aid Mechanism," *Security Council Report*, August 2023, <https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/monthly-forecast/2023-08/in-hindsight-the-demise-of-the-syria-cross-border-aid-mechanism.php>, (accessed September 20, 2023).

⁷⁴ "Efforts Remain Unsuccessful in Organizing Consultations with Syria, Senior Official Tells Security Council, Calling for Country's Full Cooperation," *United Nations Press*, September 7, 2023, <https://press.un.org/en/2023/sc15402.doc.htm>, (accessed September 20, 2023).

⁷⁵ "Efforts Remain Unsuccessful in Organizing Consultations with Syria, Senior Official Tells Security Council, Calling for Country's Full Cooperation," *United Nations Press*.