

Syria: Vote on Third Draft Resolution on Cross-Border Humanitarian Access

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What's In Blue

Posted Fri 10 Jul 2020

Today (10 July) the Security Council will announce the results of a vote on a draft resolution authorising cross-border and cross-line humanitarian access in Syria. The draft resolution in blue, which was circulated yesterday at 1300 hours by the humanitarian penholders (Belgium and Germany), calls for the re-authorisation of border crossings at Bab al-Salam and Bab al-Hawa on the Syria/Turkey border to be used by the UN and its partners to deliver humanitarian aid for a period of six months (until 10 January 2021). The current draft follows a period of very difficult negotiations and the failure of the Council to adopt two previous resolutions on the cross-border mechanism in the past 48 hours.

Yesterday at approximately 1830 hours, Russia circulated a competing draft resolution, which would re-authorise only a single border crossing — the Bab al-Hawa crossing between Syria and Turkey — for 12 months. This latest Russian draft resolution requests the Secretary-General to provide a report by the end of August on the “direct and indirect impact of unilateral coercive measures imposed on Syria on its socio-economic situation and humanitarian deliveries from outside Syria”, which is a reference to sanctions on Syria, an issue that both Russia and China have highlighted over the last several months. This language was also in the draft resolution that Russia circulated on 7 July, which failed to be adopted due to insufficient votes.

The number of border crossings to be authorised and the duration of the mechanism have been the main issues at the centre of Council members’ sharp disagreement on this renewal. The matter of unilateral sanctions imposed on Syria, described above, also emerged in negotiations as a point of contention between some members. While the penholders’ text is a technical rollover and appears to be a compromise between the two draft resolutions which the Council failed to adopt this week, a positive outcome is far from certain, particularly in light of Russia’s latest competing draft text.

On Tuesday (7 July), a draft resolution which would have re-authorised the Bab al-Salam and Bab al-Hawa border crossings for 12 months was vetoed by Russia and China. Yesterday (8 July), a draft resolution circulated by Russia calling for re-authorisation of only one border crossing, at Bab al-Hawa, for a period of six months was not adopted having received only four votes in favour (Russia, China, Viet Nam and South Africa). For more information on these previous developments, please see Security Council Report’s [What’s in Blue](#) of [7 July](#) and [8 July](#).

The draft text in blue was initially circulated and put in blue by the penholders shortly after the announcement of the voting on the Russian draft resolution at 1830 hours yesterday. Russia subsequently asked for an amendment to the draft text, requesting that it be revised to reflect the re-authorisation of only the Bab al-Hawa border crossing for six months.

The Council had agreed to a 24-hour written adoption procedure on 27 March due to the COVID-19 pandemic. While the details for voting on amendments were not spelt out separately at the time, members appear to have understood that it would follow the same time period and, in line with Rule 33 of the provisional Rules of Procedure, would be voted on ahead of the vote on the draft text. However, Germany used its prerogative as Council president to reduce the time allotted to vote on amendments to 12 hours in recognition of the imminent expiration of the current cross-border authorisation on 10 July. The results were announced in written form at noon yesterday (9 July), with only two Council members – Russia and China – voting in favour of the amendment. Seven Council members voted against the amendment and six abstained.

Voting on the penholders' draft in blue subsequently commenced at 1300 hours yesterday and was set to close today at 1300 hours. The announcement of the results is expected shortly thereafter. Given that Russia has circulated its own draft, it is possible that they may veto the penholders' draft. At the time of writing, although not confirmed, there were indications that the voting procedure for the Russian draft would only start after the results of the vote on the penholders' draft resolution is announced. If this is the case, the current border crossings' authorisation would expire before the results of the vote on the Russian draft.

The UN cross-border aid delivery mechanism was established by resolution 2165 (2014) and its mandate was renewed most recently until 10 July 2020 in resolution 2504 of 10 January. Resolution 2504—adopted after contentious negotiations by a vote of 11 in favour, none against, and four abstentions (China, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States)—re-authorised two border crossings (Bab al-Salam and Bab al-Hawa) for six months, but did not re-authorise two other crossings that had previously been in the mandate: al-Ramtha (Syria/Jordan border) and Al Yarubiyah (Syria/Iraq border).

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