

Russia allows UN Syria aid access from Turkey for 12 months

Fri, 2021-07-09 18:32

UNITED NATIONS: The UN Security Council agreed on Friday to extend a cross-border aid operation into Syria from Turkey after Russia agreed to a compromise in last minute talks with the United States that ensures UN aid access to millions of Syrians for 12 months.

"Parents can sleep tonight knowing that for the next 12 months their children will be fed. The humanitarian agreement we've reached here will literally save lives," said US Ambassador to the United Nations, Linda Thomas-Greenfield.

The council mandate for the long-running aid operation was due to expire on Saturday. After not engaging in weeks of discussion on a resolution drafted by Ireland and Norway, Syrian ally Russia on Thursday proposed a six month renewal.

Following negotiations between Thomas-Greenfield and Russian UN Ambassador Vassily Nebenzia on Friday morning, the 15-member council unanimously adopted a compromise resolution that asks for a UN report on Syria aid access in six months, but that diplomats said does not require another vote in January to again extend the cross-border operation.

Nebenzia described the vote on the resolution, presented by both the United States and Russia, as a "historical moment" that he hoped could "become a turning point that not only Syria will win from ... but the Middle Eastern region as a whole."

US President Joe Biden had raised the importance of the cross-border aid operation with Russian President Vladimir Putin in June. The Biden administration warned at the time that any future cooperation with Russia over Syria would be at risk if the cross-border aid deliveries were shut down.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres appealed to the Security Council to renew the cross-border aid operation for another year, warning that a failure to do so would be devastating for millions of people.

The council first authorized a cross-border aid operation into Syria in 2014 at four points. Last year, it whittled that down to one point from Turkey into a rebel-held area in Syria due to Russian and Chinese opposition over renewing all four.

Russia has said the aid operation is outdated and violates Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity. In a swipe at the United States and others, Russia and China have also blamed unilateral sanctions for some of Syria's plight.



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[Middle-East](#)

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[Bab Al-Hawa crossing](#)

Red Crescent warns of 'inhuman' Syria aid route closure
Threat to flow of aid to Syria is a 'life-and-death' issue

[Israeli settlements amount to war crime: UN rights expert](#)

Author:

Reuters

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Fri, 2021-07-09 14:37

GENEVA: Israeli settlements in east Jerusalem and the West Bank amount to a war crime, a UN human rights investigator said on Friday, calling on countries to inflict a cost on Israel for its "illegal occupation."

Michael Lynk, UN special rapporteur on human rights in the occupied Palestinian territory, was addressing a session of the UN Human Rights Council, boycotted by Israel which does not recognize his mandate or cooperate with him.

"I conclude that the Israeli settlements do amount to a war crime," Lynk said.

He said the settlements violate an absolute ban on an occupying power transferring part of its civilian population into an occupied territory, thereby meeting the definition of a war crime under the Rome Statute founding the International Criminal Court (ICC).

"I submit to you that this finding compels the international community ... to make it clear to Israel that its illegal occupation, and its defiance of international law and international opinion, can and will no longer be cost-free," Lynk told the Geneva rights forum.

Many countries consider the settlements a breach of international law. Israel disputes this and cites Biblical and historical connections to the land, as well as security needs.

In a separate statement, Lynk said Israeli settlements were "the engine of Israel's 54-year-old occupation". There are now close to 300 settlements in East Jerusalem and the West Bank, with more than 680,000 Israeli settlers, he said.

The United States, Israel's closest ally which has observer status at the council, was not on the speakers' list for the debate.

Lotte Knudsen, the European Union's ambassador to the United Nations in Geneva, said the settlements were illegal under international law, echoing the position of most countries.

"Such actions as forced transfers, evictions, demolitions, and confiscation of homes will only escalate an already tense environment."

Palestinian Ambassador Ibrahim Khraishi said Israel detained 5,000 Palestinians, some of them for more than 20 years.

Palestinians want to establish an independent state in the West Bank and Gaza with East Jerusalem as its capital, but the issue of Jewish settlements on land captured by Israel in a 1967 war has long been a stumbling block in the peace process. The last round of peace talks collapsed in 2014.



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Israel razes home of Palestinian shooting suspect's estranged wife
Jordan, Israel agree to water deal, more West Bank trade

[Lebanese minister denies request to quiz security chief over Beirut blast](#)

Author:

Reuters

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1625834063829372800

Fri, 2021-07-09 15:41

BEIRUT: A Lebanese minister has denied a request by the judge probing the Beirut port explosion to question a top security official, a document seen by Reuters on Friday showed.

Meanwhile attempts to deliver justice over the catastrophe continue to

flounder.

Nearly one year after the Aug. 4 explosion, which killed more than 200 people, wounded thousands more and devastated swathes of the capital, many ordinary Lebanese are furious that no senior officials have been held to account.

The blast was caused by a massive quantity of explosive chemicals that had been stored unsafely at the port for years.

The request from Judge Tarek Bitar to question Major General Abbas Ibrahim, head of the powerful General Security agency, was rejected by caretaker interior minister Mohamed Fahmy in a letter to the justice minister.

In a statement, Ibrahim said he was subject to the law like all Lebanese. But he said the probe should take place "far away from narrow political considerations."

Bitar became the lead investigator into the blast after his predecessor, Judge Fadi Sawan, was removed in February following requests from two former ministers he had charged with negligence over the blast.

Sawan had charged three ex-ministers and the outgoing prime minister Hassan Diab with negligence. But they refused to be questioned as suspects, accusing him of overstepping his powers.

A parliamentary committee convened on Friday to study a request by Bitar for immunity to be lifted from former Finance Minister Ali Hassan Khalil, former Public Works Minister Ghazi Zeaiter and former Interior Minister Nohad Machnouk.

Families of the victims protested nearby, some clutching photos of their relatives.

After being charged by Sawan, Diab said his conscience was clear, Khalil said he had no role in the blast and Zeaiter called the charges "a blatant violation." Machnouk has also denied any responsibility.



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[Middle-East](#)

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[Major General Abbas Ibrahim](#)

[Lebanon](#)

[Beirut blast](#)

[Mohamed Fahmy](#)

[Hassan Diab](#)

Lebanese judge takes aim at top politicians, officials over Beirut port blast 'Huge explosion' targets top lawyer's office in Beirut

[Ever Given owner vows to remain a regular customer of Suez authority](#)

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1625769662463163200

Thu, 2021-07-08 21:46

CAIRO: Shoei Kisen Kaisha, the Japanese owner of the Ever Given cargo ship,

said on Thursday that it will remain a regular and loyal customer of the Suez Canal Authority (SCA).

In March, the giant container ship ran aground during its crossing of the Suez Canal, causing disruption to international traffic, particularly oil tankers.

On Wednesday, the ship resumed its journey and left the Suez Canal, 106 days after becoming wedged across a southern section of the waterway for nearly a week.

After being dislodged, it was held by the SCA under court order while the authority sought compensation from the ship's owner and its insurers.

After protracted negotiations, an undisclosed settlement between the parties was reached and the SCA announced that the ship would be released.

In a statement, the company said it still maintains a good relationship with the SCA and that it has been strengthened through the experience.

Shoei Kisen Kaisha also thanked the authorities and those who worked to release the ship as soon as possible.

Yukito Higaki, head of Imabari Shipbuilding Co., which owns Shoei Kisen Kaisha, said the Suez Canal is one of the main pillars of international maritime trade.

In a recorded speech during the signing ceremony of the settlement agreement with the SCA, he praised the authority's help in floating the ship safely within seven days, noting that the company owns a large fleet of ships and will remain a regular and loyal customer of the SCA.

Higaki said that the situation was difficult, and expressed his gratitude to Lt. Gen. Osama Rabie, SCA chairman, and the Egyptian people for accomplishing the task of floating the ship.

He expressed his happiness over the "excellent relationship" between the ship-owning company and the SCA that had been maintained and had even been enhanced through the success of floating the ship.



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Egypt's headline inflation up slightly at 4.9 percent in June
Egypt to release megaship impounded over Suez blockage

[Amid Lebanon's drastic fuel shortages, the rare site of a woman petrol station attendant brings hope](#)

Thu, 2021-07-08 20:40

BEIRUT: Amid Lebanon's fuel shortage crisis, a young woman has emerged as a symbol of hope as possibly the country's only female petrol pump attendant.

Amani Mneimneh, 21, defies social taboos when each day she rolls up her sleeves and helps refuel drivers' cars.

Lebanon has been suffering massive fuel shortages as the country slides deeper into economic collapse.

Long queues outside petrol stations have sparked brawls, traffic jams, accidents and even gunfights.

Aside from the fuel crisis, most people are not used to seeing women fill their tanks in what many Lebanese would consider a job for men.

<https://www.arabnews.com/sites/default/files/main-image/2021/07/08/27047...>



Amani Mneimneh, 21, has drawn praise for taking up the job of a gas station operator as Lebanon's economy collapses (Supplied)

Two weeks ago, and struggling for work, Mneimneh defied social pressure, along with the increasingly hostile atmosphere on the roads, and started work

at Queen Station in the southern seaside city of Saida.

“I refuse to be branded by anyone,” Amani told Arab News. “I love this decent job that helps me earn my living,”

Mneimneh first worked at Queen Station in 2017 for a year after she attained her national diploma. At the time, the petrol station was the country’s only one staffed by women, but the ground-breaking business idea ran out of steam and the female staff slowly left.

“In 2017, five girls and I worked here ... they couldn’t withstand the job requirements and challenges, unlike me, I stayed for a year then quit to study,” Mneimneh said.

She enrolled in an institute to study interior design but was unable to complete the course due to financial difficulties, so instead she studied hairstyling and worked in a salon.

She said Lebanon’s devastating and deteriorating economic situation, meant she was left needing work and that’s when she went back to Queen Station.

Her parents and five siblings support her to “the maximum.”

“I am grateful and proud of them ... I am even prouder to be supporting mum and dad financially,” she said.

Last week, Hussein Taboush, an acquaintance of Amani, went to get petrol. When his turn came, he spotted Amani, who rushed shyly to hide inside. He brought her out and took photos of her working then posted them on his Facebook with a message praising her for being “hardworking, courageous and upright.”

Taboush’s post received an overwhelming reaction, with 11,000 likes, 1,300 shares and 1,700 comments.

“I had a couple of thousand followers on Facebook,” said Amani. “When Hussein posted the photos, I sarcastically asked him if he was going to make me famous.”

When she woke up the next day, her followers exceeding 10,800.

She said her phone was inundated with WhatsApp messages and calls she received in reaction to Taboush’s post.

“I couldn’t believe my eyes. There were thousands of comments, shares and likes. Many of them invigorated and supported me while others criticized and shamed me for taking up what many label by a man’s job,” she said.

Mneimneh earns 700,000 Lebanese pounds a day (the equivalent of \$42) and works six days a week from 8am-3pm.

Recalling an affectionate incident at work, she said one woman, who was weeping and exhausted having queued for hours, “came down from her car and hugged me in support when I gently told her to smile and be patient.”

Asked whether she had faced abuse from irritated customers, she said she always smiles and asks them to “calm down and be patient.”

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11K

1.8K Comments 1.4K Shares

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Expatriate workers at gas stations in Lebanon face insults, threats and assault amid fuel shortage
Mother and four daughters killed as they looked for fuel amid Lebanon's petrol shortage