

Forum: Human Rights Council 2
Issue: The human rights situation in Syria
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Introduction

In late 2010, the rise in peaceful protests against the government in Tunisia spread across the Arab World. These series of protests were named the 'Arab Spring'. According to BBC, the Syrian officials arresting and torturing children due to them painting anti-government slogans led to the civilians gathering to protest. What began as a peaceful protest demanding the release of the children, soon turned into a cautious protest for democracy due to the government's violent response. BBC states the death toll reached 1,000 by mid-May of 2011. In an interview of Bashar al Assad conducted by RT, he states: "The problem is not between me and the people (of Syria). I don't have a problem with the people." It can be depicted from his statement that Assad will not acknowledge that there is a problem between him/his regime and the Syrian civilians. However, millions of Syrian rebels are against Assad's forces and regime.

Since the beginning of the civil war from 2011 to 2018, the death toll is half a million. 400,000 of those were executed and 100,000 were reportedly missing. According to the website dedicated to the human rights concerns due to the Syrian Civil war, 11,000,000 Syrian civilians fled from Syria to other countries, such as Jordan, Germany, Egypt, Iran, etc. and 13.5 million civilians within the country need humanitarian aid. According to the Human Rights Watch, the Syrian Government utilizes "starvation as a war tactic" and "launched numerous chemical weapons attacks on civilians in opposition-held areas." Attacks on public structures, such as hospitals, schools, and mosques, have also been persistent. Destruction of hospitals is a disadvantage to the victims of the numerous bombs and chemical attacks carried out by the government.

Along with the attacks carried out by the government on the rebels, extremist groups, such as ISIS have formed and resided in a town in Syria named Raqqa. Since the formation of ISIS, ISIS has built a reputation of being oppressive and inhumane for carrying out attacks, holding civilian hostages, etc. around the world. The US, in particular, had no adequate precautions to lessen the civilian deaths from their coalition attacks carried out in ISIS occupied regions and other regions. Since the beginning of the civil war, the human rights watch claims there has been arbitrary arrests and mysterious disappearances, use of chemical weapons by Assad's Regime, unlawful restrictions on humanitarian aid, and the US directly attacks a Syrian Army Base.

Definition of Key Terms

Civil War

A civil war is a conflict between the people within the state and/or with non-state intervention within the state. In Syria, rebels are against Assad's Regime. Several foreign countries have intervened, such as USA, Russia, etc., either for Assad or against.

Syrian Rebels

The Syrian civilians who have risen as an armed opposition movement against the Bashar al-Assad's Regime.

Human Rights

Rights that every human is entitled to inherently, regardless of their nationality, gender, the color of skin, religion or ethnicity. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights states the fundamental list of human rights to which everyone is entitled. There are 48 signatories and 8 abstentions to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Syria signed.

Arab Spring

Series of Anti Government protests led by an Arab countries' civilians. Began in late 2010 in Tunisia and spread across Egypt, Libya, Syria, Yemen, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and Jordan.

Extremist/Terrorist Group

Extremism is the construct of having extreme views on a specific matter. In this case, the extremism and terrorist groups would be: Al Qaeda, ISIS, Hezbollah, Jihadists, etc. They are known for terrorising and taking military action against humanity. These groups are present in Syria and play an active role in the civil war.

Chemical Weapons

Chemical weapons is another type of weapon which is specialized in using chemical as a way to inflict pain and harm. Chemical weapons are internationally condemned due to its severity. Relating to this issue, Assad's Regime utilises chemical weapons on rebels/civilians as a tactic to advance in the war.

Background Information

Since the beginning of the Civil War in Syria in 2011, the violation of human rights was evident in several different forms, such as arbitrary arrests, restriction on humanitarian aid, use of chemical weapons, and refugees. The refugee crisis came as a result of the violations of human rights and oppression.

Causes of the Civil War

According to Vox, the civil war erupted from the negative response from the government to the Arab Spring protest. Civilians took to the streets and protested for freedom. The government responded with an attack on the civilians. Several civilians from the Syrian Army left to join the civilians fighting back. They began calling themselves the Free Syrian Army. Due to the uprising civil war, several extremist groups from around the world came to Syria in support of the rebels/free syrian army.

Vox claims Assad supported this and released Jihadists from prisons to join the rebels. During that time, Al Qaeda opens a branch in Syria.

Iran, Syria's ally, intervenes on behalf of Syria and the Gulf States intervene through Turkey and Jordan for the rebels and against Assad. Both of these major countries provides arms, resources, etc., due to the growing death toll. US expresses its concern over the situation in Syria and urges the Gulf states to withdraw their support from extremist groups. Their request was left unanswered.

The civil war continued, however, it took a turn when Assad's regime utilised chemical weapons on the rebels/civilians. Assad received a huge condemnation from the international community. Russia joined the war as Assad's ally in 2015. Russia provided the regime with weaponry, resources, etc. which ended up boosting Assad's influence over the attacks and power.

US intervention in Syria began with a less active role. US did not agree with the deteriorating of the human rights situation in Syria by Assad's Regime. Thus, US intervention consisted of providing rebels with CIA trained troops in their war against Assad. However, as ISIS began it's upheaval, US deviated it's focus to attacking ISIS rather than specifically Assad's Regime. Trump's Administration, however, took a more active role in the civil war after withdrawing from it. This was due to Assad's Regime using chemical weapons which led to the US air striking bases in Syria.

Use of Chemical Weapons by Assad's Regime

Since 2011, Assad's Regime resorted to the use of chemical weapons as a tactic against the rebels for the war. According to the Human Rights Watch, chemical weapons were used on "at least four occasions since late 2016." This article was written in 2017. Chemical weapons, specifically, sarin, VX, mustard gas and chlorine gas has been used (The Washington Post). The most common being the sarin nerve agent which was created during Nazi Germany and has the effect of a quick death. The use of sarin nerve agent has been condemned and banned in 1997 under the International Law. This mass use of chemical weapons by Assad's Regime risked an active US military intervention during Obama's Presidency. Syria responded to this backed by Russia by agreeing to hand over their chemical weapons. However, even though it did stop US intervention that time, Syria utilized chemical weapons again which led to the US, under Trump's administration, take military action through launching missiles into a Syrian Army Base.

Douma Chemical Attack

Douma was the last rebel-held territory in eastern Ghouta. BBC reports the chemical attack at Douma resulted in over 40 deaths. The chemical weapon used in Douma was reported to be chlorine gas. The Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) discovered medics in the region stated that over 500 civilians “exhibiting signs and symptoms consistent with exposure to toxic chemicals.” The government denied using chemical weapons for this attack. Since then, the government has conducted several more attacks with the use of chemical weapons.

Arbitrary Arrests and Enforced Disappearances

Arbitrary arrests and mysterious disappearances are common in Syria. The Human Rights Watch claims the Syrian government is responsible for most of “4,252 individual arbitrary arrests.” The Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR) documents that “over 80,000 individuals remain disappeared.” The pattern and people arrested or missing suggest that those people were actively expressing their human rights concerns within the country.

Bassel Khartabil

Bassel Khartabil was a known activist and software engineer. He was confirmed by his wife to be executed by the Syrian government after being arbitrarily arrested. Khartabil was praised internationally for being one of the only people actively speaking about freedom and democracy within Syria after the civil war broke out. He was praised to voice his wish for a peaceful revolution rather than a violent one. Khartabil was arbitrarily arrested a year after the civil war began. He was allowed substantial contact with his family before. The Independent states his wife continued his campaign for his voice to continue in the international world. She announced and confirmed her husband’s execution by the government through the campaign.

Restrictions of Humanitarian Aid

As the death toll raised and the number of bombings raised, the need for humanitarian increased. Especially in medical facilities, equipment is essential to treat injured civilians. The Guardian claims “the Syrian government is known to have removed items such as incubators and refused to let subsequent convoys into some areas.” The lack of medical supplies, such as anesthesia, forces the physicians to perform surgeries while the patient is fully conscious. Physicians for Human Rights (PHR) states: “The Syrian government is bombing a besieged, densely populated area, then refusing bandages, trauma kits, and blood clotting agents for those affected by the bombing.” The restrictions on medical supplies to injured civilians due to the bombings further threatens

Moreover, UNICEF aid has extreme difficulty reaching the civilians with the restrictions imposed as stated in an article by UNICEF: “The delivery of humanitarian assistance remains extremely difficult due to active conflict, insecurity, restriction of movement and the imposition of deliberate constraints, including burdensome administrative procedures.” Additionally, access to humanitarian aid has been stopped from reaching 300,000 civilians in eastern Aleppo after the fall of Aleppo by government forces

(The Guardian). These humanitarian aid restrictions imposed by the government is cutting out access to millions of Syrians.

Refugee Crisis

Millions of Syrians are displaced within Syria and around the world. According to the Syrian Refugee, 11 million Syrians have fled their country since the civil war began in 2011. The human rights violations and oppression left several in a concern for their family which led them to flee. Neighboring countries, such as Jordan, Iraq, Lebanon, and Egypt took in most of the refugees initially. Refugees in these countries reside in refugee camps. However, due to the sudden influx of refugees, the UN was not prepared which resulted in several refugee camps being undersupplied. This led to the refugees seeking asylum in Europe. Due to the millions of refugees, Germany specifically, opened up their borders to all refugees. Along with Germany, several other countries within the European Union opened up their borders to Syrian refugees with a number restriction.

Fall of Aleppo

Aleppo was the only urbanized main city under rebel control. Fall of Aleppo was due to the strategic takeover conducted by Assad's Regime. It began by Russian airstrikes bombarding the eastern rebel-held Aleppo while Assad's forces encircled the rebel-held side. According to Vox, Eastern Aleppo was under siege for several days which not only stopped humanitarian aid from reaching the rebels but also weakened them. The government took advantage of the rebel's weak state and invaded. After the battle of Aleppo, the death toll raised up to 400,000. Aleppo is in ruins at the moment and the rebels were forced to evacuate.

Extremist/Terrorist Groups Involvement in the Civil War

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Major Countries and Organizations Involved

Syria

The government of Syria, Bashar al-Assad's Regime took violent measures in a peaceful protest, which led to an upheaval. The ideologies and belief of the rebels in Daraa became more prevalent to

neighboring towns which led to the rise of civilians against the regime. Since 2011, the government has used chemical weapons numerous times and bombed rebel-held territories. The most urbanized that was under the rebel control was the city of Aleppo. However, according to the Human Rights Watch, the government gained control of Aleppo through the partnership with Russia to lead airstrikes on medical facilities and civilian buildings. Along with attacking hospitals, there have been numerous airstrikes near schools (Human Rights Watch).

Assad believes the rebels to "enemies of God and puppets of the West." He has ruled out any peace talks with the rebels. In an interview conducted by RT, he also states that he does not have any problems with the people. People being the civilians that support him.

United States of America (USA)

The US has a negative stance on the actions of Bashar Al Assad against the rebels. The country's stance, in the beginning, was more as a mediator. The USA did not take active actions in the beginning until the first time Assad's Regime used chemical weapons on the civilians. Obama planned to respond to the use of chemical weapons through a targeted military strike on the regime. However, USA did not do so as Russia proposed Syria surrendering its chemical weapons to avoid a US attack. US active participation began as the first batch of CIA training and arms reached the Syrian rebels.

However, US's attention deviated towards the newly formed extremist group known as the Islamic State of Syria and Iraq (ISIS). According to VOX, US began training those rebels who only attack ISIS. Regardless, after Trump's election as President, he has backed away from Syria until Assad's Regime utilized chemical weapons again. Trump's response to this was to use military action against Syria. He gave the order to launch missiles into an Army Base in Syria. Along with the military action, the US has sanctions imposed on Syria too.

Thus, US intervention in the Syrian Civil War is motivated by the use of chemical weapons against civilians by Assad's Regime. According to ThoughtCo, US blames the Syrian government for the death toll.

Russia

Russia's intervention began in September 2015 in the form of military in Assad's side. The country claimed their intervention was solely to take military action against ISIS. However, Russia only ended up taking military actions against the rebels in Syria who are opposed to Assad. According to VOX, Russian military aid to Assad's Regime aided the fall of Aleppo from the oppositions. The Huffpost claims Russia's support to Syria is through the provision of arms and weaponry. Assad's survival is dependent on Russia's support (HuffPost).

Business Insider claims Russia's intervention is due to its support to counter-terrorism and interest in keeping the country stabilized. Syria's ally is Russia.

However, Russia's support to Assad has been a disadvantage at the UN. The resolutions created in the Security Council to address the situation in Syria and to take actions towards ending the war are all being vetoed by Russia.

European Union (EU)

Along with the US, The European Union has a negative stance on the actions of Bashar Al Assad against the rebels. EU has not directly intervened in the Syrian Civil War with their presence in Syria. Their intervention comes in the forms of imposing sanctions on Syria. EU's main focus is to place Syria in an isolation with these sanctions. The Western powers, EU and USA both imposed heavy restrictive sanctions on Syria. All foreign ministers of the EU states, "The European Union will continue to consider further restrictive measures against Syria as long as the repression continues," EU has also stated that Syria is at a risk of further restrictions on sanctions if the situation worsens. EU has also adopted the 'EU Strategy for Syria' which consists of political and humanitarian actions to end the Syrian Civil War (Human Rights Watch).

Along with imposing sanctions, the European Union, specific to Germany, agreed to open their doors to all Syrian Refugees which makes them more involved in the matter.

Iran

Along with Russia, Iran has a major role in the involvement in the Syrian Civil War. Iran's intervention is in the form of providing Assad's Regime with financial aid, military aid, and intelligence training. According to the Combating Terrorism Center, Iran has provided Syria with \$1 billion and an additional \$3.6 billion. Along with the financial aid, Iran has provided Syria with 5,000 paramilitary groups to help Syria government forces with the unrest between the regime and civilians (Combating Terrorism Center). James Ball from Washington Post claims that the production and advancement of Syria's chemical weapons are through Iran aid.

Speculations of Iran supporting an extremist group known as Hezbollah is to be a reason to Iran's unwavering support to Bashar al-Assad. Hezbollah fighters fought alongside Bashar al-Assad in the civil war (The Guardian). A foreign policy aide from Iran, Ali Akbar Velayti stated: "Like before, Iran will stand by Syria under any circumstances." Another reason for Iran's support to Syria is due to them being allies.

Gulf States

Along with the countries mentioned above, the intervention by the Gulf States in Syria is not close to ceasing. The Gulf States intervention in Syria consists of providing the rebel and extremist groups with resources and weaponry (Vox) due to them being strictly against Assad's Regime. This intervention was also to counter Iran's aid to Assad's Regime. The Gulf States, however, did not directly intervene. Their provision of aid and resources to the rebels and extremist groups that are against Assad's Regime were through neighboring countries, such as, Turkey and Jordan. However, according to the European

Council on Foreign Relations, within the Gulf States, a few of them withdrew their ambassadors and closed their embassies from Syria. The Gulf States' main reason of intervening in Syria is due to being against Assad's Regime. However, according to Center for Strategic & International Studies, an underlying reason for their intervention is the belief that Iran's influence will significantly decrease if Assad's Regime is toppled.

Human Rights Watch (HRW)

The Human Rights Watch is a non-governmental organization that took upon the responsibility to discover and advocates for human rights. The Human Rights Watch have been responsible for covering and reporting the human rights situation in Syria due to the Syrian Civil War which began in 2011. HRW makes a strong claim when it comes to Bashar al-Assad's regime, one being: "the Syrian government has conducted deliberate and indiscriminate attacks against civilians and civilian infrastructure, withheld humanitarian aid, employed starvation as a war tactic, and forcibly displaced Syrians in contravention of international law." HRW has shown huge concern over the violations of human rights in Syria for several years. Especially more after the use of chemical weapons on civilians.

United Nations High Commissioner of Refugees (UNHCR)

According to UNHCR, there are 5.6 million registered Syrian refugees. Since the refugee crisis began, the UNHCR have been providing the refugees with essential medical and humanitarian aid, such as, "stoves and fuel for heating, insulation for tents, thermal blankets and winter clothing." Moreover, UNHCR has also been actively working with several other humanitarian aid organisations to collect funds to continue the provision of aids. They have appealed for \$8million to continue these aids. Additionally, UNHCR also appealed for \$5million to provide the refugee camps in the neighboring countries with aid to sustain and expand the camp. UNHCR plays an active role in providing aid for the millions of unfortunate Syrians around the world, in the country, and in neighboring countries.

Timeline of Events

Date	Description of event
March, 2011	The Attack of the peaceful Arab Spring Protest by Bashar al-Assad Dictator, Bashar al-Assad attacks the peaceful protest which erupted due to the police arresting teenagers after spray painting anti-government slogans.
July, 2011	Formation of the Free Syrian Army Troops of the Syrian army left to join the rebel
2012	Extremists join the Rebels
2012	Iran backs Assad's Regime Assad's ally

The Gulf States back the Rebels

Gulf states send weapons through Turkey, who also supports rebels and then through Jordan.

April, 2013	Obama Administration's request to the Gulf States to end funding of Extremists goes ignored.
August, 2013	The use of chemical weapons on the rebels
August, 2013	US CIA trained troops to reach the rebels.
February, 2014	Islamic State of Iraq and Syria is formed
September, 2014	US bombs ISIS Russia intervenes in behalf of Assad
September, 2015	Russia intervenes through military aid. The country intervened on the basis to fight against ISIS but only bombs the rebels.
2016	Fall of Aleppo Assad retakes the only urbanized city which was under the rebels' control.
2017	The use of chemical weapons again against the civilians. US active intervention
2017	The US launched missiles into a Syrian airbase as a response to the use of chemical weapons by Assad's Regime.

Relevant UN Treaties and Events

- On the Situation in the Middle East (Syria), 31 December 2016 ([S/RES/2336](#))
- World Conference on Human Rights, 18 December 1992 ([A/RES/47/122](#))
- United Nations Security Council Resolution 2209, 6 March 2015, ([S/RES/2209](#))
- Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 10 December 1948 ([A/RES/3/217A](#))
- United Nations Security Council Resolution 2401, 24 February 2018, ([S/RES/2401](#))
- Condemns the recent killings in El-Houleh, calls upon the Syrian authorities to grant humanitarian organizations access to provide assistance, and calls for the implementation of the Six-Point proposal, 4 June 2012, ([A/HRC/RES/S-19/1](#))
- Demanding Immediate, Unhindered Access for Observation of Monitoring Civilian Evacuations from Aleppo, Syria, 19 December 2016, ([S/RES/2328](#))
- UN Security Council endorses cessation of hostilities pact in Syria, 26 February 2016, ([S/RES/2268](#))
- 30-Day Ceasefire in Syria, 24 February 2018, ([S/RES/2401](#))

Previous Attempts to solve the Issue

Due to the growing issue of the Syrian Civil War, the international world attempted several times to solve the issue. Following the use of chemical weapons on the rebels by the Assad's Regime, the EU imposed sanctions on Syria (Reuters). Their sanctions consist of restrictions on the arms embargo, freezing assets, a ban on being in business with the Syrian Central Bank. According to Reuters, these sanctions were placed to "isolate" Syria from the international world and to encourage the change in the situation regarding the Civil War in Syria. EU believed the need for isolation is needed as Assad's Regime refuses to fully comply with the suggestions given to better the human rights situation in Syria.

The US has also imposed sanctions on Syria. These sanctions consist freezing assets of Syria, the Syrian companies, and anyone who is involved in the making and using of chemical weapons. US has also banned "exports, sales or supply of services, along with any new investments, into Syria by any U.S. person" (Reuters). The sanctions by both US and EU were due to "brutal repression and violation of human rights." Along with imposing sanctions, the US actively intervened in the war by launching missiles into an Air Base in Syria as a response to the use of chemical weapons recently.

These sanctions were made by the EU and US as a way of playing restrictions on Syria politically and isolating it from international world. However, some of these sanctions have had a negative impact on the Syrian healthcare according to Reuters. It impacted the transaction of some medications and resulted in several pharmaceutical companies not being able to work in Syria.

Along with the sanctions imposed, several NGOs and organisations have been created to aid the displaced Syrians and the Syrians in medical need. An example of this would be the Cross Border Humanitarian Aid which focuses on transporting aid along the rebel held borders. This, along with other forms of ways of providing humanitarian aid, has been proven to be slightly difficult due to the limitations imposed by the Syrian government.

The United Nations have tried multiple ways to solve this issue. The UN committees, Human Rights Council, Security Council, and the General Assembly has drafted several resolutions which passed addressing and condemning the violations of human rights taking place in Syria (Peace Women). However, the only way the solutions in these resolutions created in the Security Council will go into effect if Russia stops vetoing.

Possible Solutions

The violations of the human rights in Syria know no boundaries. From the use of chemical weapons to the often bombings. The human rights situation in Syria due to the civil war worsens every day. The restrictions in humanitarian aid, as previously noted, limits the amount of aid needed for the millions of displaced and injured civilians within the country. **Provision of funds and aid to the Cross-Border Humanitarian Aid in Syria**, herein, could be a viable solution. The Cross-Border Humanitarian Aid initiative is led by the United Nations to provide humanitarian aid to civilians in

rebel-held areas. Humanitarian aid, such as water, food, medical instruments, medicinal drugs, etc. Due to the lack of resources available for civilians within Syria, several NGOs and other organisations have been created to aid those in need. These funds and aid will allow the organisations to be able to continue their mission and help those who have been a victim to the violations of human rights. However, this is a bit tricky due to the Syrian government limiting access.

Additionally, due to the bombings of medical facilities within the country, the **formation of Medical Facilities around the borders**, could be a viable solution. These medical facilities can aid the people inside the country through the Cross-Border Initiative. Member states providing financial aid for humanitarian aid to Syria could direct that aid towards the Cross-Border initiative and for the formation of Medical Facilities. Due to bombing and chemical attacks, several rebels/civilians have been extremely injured. However, several were left untreated due to the lack of medical facilities. However, a limitation with this solution would be to think about how patients can be transported from within the country to the borders in a short amount of time.

Furthermore, due to the large influx of Syrian refugees in a refugee camp in Jordan, several needs and aids are not being met for every refugee. Therefore, **funds to the refugee camps in neighboring countries are highlighted**. Thereby, being able to provide for all refugees. Several refugee camps are overflowing and lacks in resources. Thus, being unable to provide for all refugees.

Moreover, due to the bombings of schools in Syria, children have been cut off the access to education. Thus, **building educational facilities within the Syrian border or increasing funds for UNICEF's project on educating the children**, is a viable option. These educational facilities can be built in the refugee camps or can be led by the NGOs who have access within Syria. Supporting and increasing funds for supplies for UNICEF's project will allow UNICEF to more actively give a quality education. Education is an important aspect in ones' life. It allows them to advance in the world. The lack of education available for all children in Syria is a serious concern. This solution also works towards achieving SDG goal number 4, Quality Education.

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Appendix or Appendices

- I. <https://www.google.com/search?q=best+delegate&oq=best+delegate&aqs=chrome.69i59j69i65l2j69i60j69i61j0.1589j0j7&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8> (Best Delegate)

This website is useful, especially for newer delegates as well as experienced ones, as it provides all delegates with several resources (MUN starter pack, research ideas).

- II. <http://www.unhcr.org/> (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees)

This website includes most important facts about the millions of Syrian Refugees that have fled the country since the beginning of the war. Additionally, it includes the humanitarian actions taken by the UNHCR since the

beginning of the civil war. Overall, this website has a general information on any topics related to refugees and humanitarian crisis.

III. <http://www.un.org/en/documents/index.html> (UN Documents)

This website consists of all UN documents. It will especially be useful when looking for any relevant treaties and additional information about any issue.

IV. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JFpanWNgfQY> (Syria's war: Who is fighting and why)

This video explains the countries involved in the Syria War in an effective and simple manner. The video provides useful background information which will aid in understanding the topic.

V. <https://www.thepeninsulaqatar.com/article/23/09/2017/Qatar-for-comprehensive-solution-to-Syria-crisis>
(Article on the financial aid provided by Qatar)

This article could be helpful for the delegate of Qatar and could give ideas about possible solutions for the resolution.

VI. <https://www.unicef.org/appeals/syria.html> (More In-depth about UNICEF vision in Syria)

The 'Humanitarian Strategy' section provides a detailed plan and vision UNICEF has for Syria. This could help with resolution.

VII. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VFQOHbA3nes> (Cross-Border Humanitarian Aid)

This video is useful especially to visualize where the cross-borders are located. However, keep in mind that since 2014 (publication of the video) the Syrian government has gained control of Aleppo.