As the UN Secretary General stated in his recent remarks to the UN Security Council, humanitarian needs in Syria are at their highest since the conflict began more than a decade ago, with 4.1M people continuing to rely upon lifesaving UN-coordinated humanitarian aid provided across the Syria/Türkiye border, presently under cover of an unprecedented Security Council mandate for humanitarian aid, which would ordinarily be a matter for the UN Secretariat.

In 2014, that Security Council mandate may have been politically and logistically necessary. However, as a coalition of leading international lawyers and legal experts (many of whom affirmed that a Security Council resolution is legally unnecessary for UN cross-border aid operations in 2014) we adjudge that today it is just one route by which to legalise the continuation of cross-border aid in Syria.

First, through the Syrian Government’s sovereign decision in ratifying them, the Syrian conflict is governed by Common Article III to the Geneva Conventions of 1949, which also represents customary international law, and allows access negotiations to take place between impartial humanitarian bodies and all “Parties to the conflict”, including those outside of the Government.

Second, continuing UN aid coordination across borders is lawful for States and UN Agencies under Public International Law more generally, as the International Court of Justice, the UN’s principal legal organ, has authoritatively confirmed that “there can be no doubt that the provision of strictly humanitarian aid to persons or forces in another country, whatever their political affiliations or objectives, cannot be regarded as unlawful intervention, or as in any other way contrary to international law.”

Third, we note that a refusal to permit cross-border aid is unlawful where it is arbitrary, such as where that refusal breaches international law, leads to discrimination (e.g., according to race, gender, political opinion or religion) among those in need, goes beyond what is absolutely necessary to the achievement of a purported legitimate aim, or may lead to lack of predictability. In the face of such refusals, arguments to continue cross-border aid may arise on the basis that it is necessary to counter the Syrian Government’s arbitrary denials so as to prevent distress, strife, and starvation for millions.

Finally, and in any event, we stress that NGOs are not regulated by, and can therefore continue to provide cross-border assistance under, relevant rules of Public International Law, and States and UN Agencies may provide indirect assistance to them in order to do so, as the threshold for attributing the conduct of private bodies to States or International Organisations under international law is extremely high.

Overly cautious interpretations of international law should not risk the lives of millions who continue to rely on cross-border aid in the north and north-west, nor should they be allowed to change and politicise the landscape of International Humanitarian Law as it stands today. Not doing so risks creating a historic, dangerous precedent for millions of people in Syria and in conflict areas around the world. As many of us did in 2014, we again urge the UN to apply International Humanitarian Law so that it enables, rather than prevents, life-saving assistance reaching those in need.
Professor Judge Bruno Simma
Former Judge of the International Court of Justice. Former Member of the UN Committee on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights. Former Member of the UN International Law Commission. Co-founder and Editor of the European Journal of International Law and co-founder of the European Society of International Law. Arbitrator at the Iran-US-Claims Tribunal. Co-author of Universelles Völkerrecht, one of the most influential textbooks in international law. Editor of the leading Commentary on the Charter of the United Nations.

Professor Judge John Dugard SC
Former Judge ad hoc of the International Court of Justice. Formerly member of the UN International Law Commission and Special Rapporteur on Diplomatic Protection, Chair of the UN Human Rights Inquiry Commission to Investigate Violations of Human Rights and Humanitarian Law in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, and UN Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in the Occupied Palestinian Territory.

Professor Sir Judge Howard Morrison KC KCMG CBE
Former President of the Appeals division of the International Criminal Court. Former trial judge at the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia. Former Defence Counsel at the International Criminal Tribunals for the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda. Honorary Professor - Leicester University. Senior Fellow of the Lauterpacht Centre for International Law - Cambridge University. Visiting Professor - Northumbria University. Bencher - Gray's Inn.

Judge Richard Goldstone

Ambassador Stephen Rapp
Former Ambassador-at-Large, Office of Global Criminal Justice, US State Department, Chief Prosecutor of the Special Court for Sierra Leone, and Senior Trial Attorney and Chief of Prosecutions at the United Nations International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda. Senior Visiting Fellow of Practice with the Blavatnik School’s Institute for Ethics, Law, and Armed Conflict’s Programme on International Peace and Security.

Wayne Jordash KC
Counsel to the former head of Serbia’s state security at the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia. Former defence counsel at the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda and the Special Court for Sierra Leone. Former counsel to the Serbian State at the International Court of Justice. Former advisor to the Principal Defender at the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia. Founding partner – Global Rights Compliance LLP.
Professor Walter Kälin
Member of the Expert Advisory Group for the United Nations Secretary General’s High-Level Panel on Internal Displacement. Professor emeritus for international and (Swiss) constitutional law - University of Bern/Switzerland. Present Envoy of the Chair of the Platform on Disaster Displacement. Special Advisor to the UN’s Resident/Humanitarian Coordinators on Somalia and Ethiopia. Former Representative of the UN Secretary-General on the Human Rights of Internally Displaced Persons. Member - UN Human Rights Committee. Special Rapporteur of the UN Human Rights Commission on the Situation of Human Rights in Kuwait under Iraqi Occupation.

Professor Payam Akhavan
Professor of International Law and Senior Fellow - Massey College, University of Toronto. Member of the Permanent Court of Arbitration. Former Legal Advisor, Office of the Prosecutor, International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia. Formerly counsel before the International Criminal Court, the International Court of Justice, and the European Court of Human Rights. Senior Advisor to the Ministry of Global Affairs of Canada. Senior Fellow and Canadian Co-Chair - Raoul Wallenberg Centre for Human Rights. Co-Founder - Iran Human Rights Documentation Centre.

Professor Micheal Bothe
Chair, Commission for International Humanitarian Law and German Red Cross. President of the International Humanitarian Fact-Finding Commission. Formerly counsel in various cases before the International Court of Justice and the German Federal Constitutional Court. Author of numerous publications on international law and the use of force, international humanitarian law, international, European, and comparative environmental law as well as comparative constitutional law.

Professor Marco Sassòli
Professor of International Law - University of Geneva. Former Director of the Geneva Academy of International Humanitarian Law and Special Advisor (pro bono) on international humanitarian law to the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court. Former Deputy Head of Legal Division, Head of delegations in Jordan and Syria, and Protection Coordinator for the former Yugoslavia for the International Committee of the Red Cross.

Professor Gabriella Citroni

Professor Carsten Stahn
Professor of International Criminal Law and Global Justice. Former research fellow - Max Planck Institute for Comparative Public Law and International Law. Former legal officer in

**Professor Boisson de Chazournes**

Professor of international law - University of Geneva School of Law. Co-director - Geneva Centre for International Dispute Settlement. Writings and practice in various fields such as international economic law, international dispute settlement, international environmental law, the law of international organizations and boundaries and law of the sea. Recognized practitioner for her role as an advisor to many international organisations, states, and non-state entities both public and private, as well as an arbitrator and counsel in various dispute settlement fora.

**Professor Ben Saul**

Challis Chair of International Law - University of Sydney and Associate Fellow of Chatham House. Formerly counsel in cases before the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, Special Tribunal for Lebanon, Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia, and the Inter-American Court of Human Rights. Lead counsel in five successful national security cases before the UN Human Rights Committee. Advisor/Consultant to the UN, the International Committee of the Red Cross, governments, regulators, judiciaries, and NGOs.

**Dr. Mark Kersten**


**Dr. Rebecca Barber**

Research Fellow - Asia Pacific Centre for the Responsibility to Protect. Research focus on the competence of the UN General Assembly in relation to atrocity prevention and response, drawing on more than 15 years of experience in humanitarian assistance, primarily with international NGOs, including long-term roles in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Sudan and Indonesia and shorter-term assignments throughout South-East Asia and the Pacific. Serves on the Advisory Board of the International Rule of Law Initiative and the IHL Advisory Committee of the Australian Red Cross.