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Programme budget for the biennium 2018–2019

Revised estimates for the United Nations Monitoring Mechanism for the Syrian Arab Republic relating to the programme budget for the biennium 2018–2019

Report of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions

1. The Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions has considered the report of the Secretary-General on the revised estimates for the United Nations Monitoring Mechanism for the Syrian Arab Republic relating to the programme budget for the biennium 2018–2019 under section 27, Humanitarian assistance, and section 36, Staff assessment ([A/73/729](#)). During its consideration of the report, the Advisory Committee met representatives of the Secretary-General, who provided additional information, concluding with written responses received on 15 March 2019.

2. In its resolution [2165 \(2014\)](#), the Security Council decided to establish, for a period of 180 days, a mechanism to monitor, with the consent of the relevant neighbouring countries of the Syrian Arab Republic, the loading of all humanitarian relief consignments of the United Nations humanitarian agencies and their implementing partners at the relevant United Nations facilities. In paragraph 3 of its resolution, the Council decided that the mechanism would also monitor any subsequent opening of the consignments by the customs authorities of the relevant neighbouring countries at certain border crossings with Iraq, Jordan and Turkey, with notification to the Syrian authorities, in order to confirm the humanitarian nature of the consignments. The Council subsequently extended the mandate of the Mechanism by its resolutions [2191 \(2014\)](#), [2258 \(2015\)](#), [2332 \(2016\)](#), [2393 \(2017\)](#) and, most recently, until 10 January 2020, [2449 \(2018\)](#).

3. The proposed revised estimates cover the year 2019 for a total of \$3,018,500 net (\$3,288,700 gross). Taking into account the unencumbered balance of \$225,900 net (\$227,700 gross) against the approved resources for the Mechanism for 2018, the Secretary-General is requesting, in his report, additional resources under the programme budget for the biennium 2018–2019 in the amount of \$2,792,600 net (\$3,061,000 gross) under section 27, Humanitarian assistance, and section 36, Staff assessment, to be offset by an equivalent amount under income section 1, Income



from staff assessment. Therefore, the revised estimates for the biennium 2018–2019 would total \$6,542,600 net (\$7,151,000 gross). The Secretary-General indicates that the requirements of the Mechanism for the 2020 part of the current mandate, i.e., until 10 January 2020, would be included in the proposed programme budget for 2020.

4. The Advisory Committee was informed, upon enquiry, that, following the extension of the mandate by the Security Council on 13 December 2018, the Secretary-General had been meeting the current requirements by using an amount of \$225,900, representing the Mechanism's unencumbered balance, and an amount of \$400,000, provided under his authority to enter into commitments to meet unforeseen and extraordinary expenses arising in the biennium 2018–2019, pursuant to General Assembly resolution 72/264. The Committee was also informed that the aforementioned commitment in the amount of \$400,000 would be reversed upon the decision of the Assembly on the report of the Secretary-General. **The Committee expects that the Secretary-General will provide a detailed explanation to the General Assembly, at the time of its consideration of the present report, on the use of the commitments provided under the authority of the Secretary-General, on the possibility to reverse commitments already entered into and on the modalities to carry over unencumbered balances. The Committee trusts that related information will be included in the second performance report on the programme budget for the biennium 2018–2019.**

Mandate implementation

5. The Secretary-General indicates that cross-border deliveries have remained steady since the adoption of Security Council resolution 2165 (2014) and that, from July 2014 to 31 December 2018, 916 shipments, or 23,193 trucks, crossed the border into the Syrian Arab Republic, comprising 18,529 trucks from Turkey, 4,595 from Jordan and 69 from Iraq. He also indicates that cross-border deliveries from Iraq began on 7 March 2018, while cross-border deliveries from Jordan were discontinued in June 2018, after the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic re-established control in the south-west of the country and humanitarian assistance in that region was provided from within the country. The Secretary-General indicates that the Mechanism has successfully monitored and confirmed the humanitarian nature of all consignments without incidents or complaints from any party (A/73/729, para. 4). The Advisory Committee was informed, upon enquiry, that the mandate of the Mechanism pertained to monitoring the loading of humanitarian relief consignments of United Nations humanitarian agencies¹ and their implementing partners.

Key performance indicators

6. With respect to the results-based budgeting information contained in table 1 of the report of the Secretary-General, the Advisory Committee notes that certain expected accomplishments and indicators of achievement contain elements that are not directly within the purview of the Mechanism, including, for example, an increased number of United Nations and partner agencies delivering aid. **The Committee reiterates its view that expected accomplishments and indicators of achievement should accurately reflect what could be achieved by United Nations**

¹ The Advisory Committee was informed, upon enquiry, that the following seven United Nations entities sent regular consignments through the process: United Nations Children's Fund, World Food Programme, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, International Organization for Migration, United Nations Population Fund, World Health Organization and Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations.

entities and the activities for which they can be held accountable (see, for example, [A/73/498](#), para. 58).

Staffing requirements

7. As indicated in the report of the Secretary-General, the proposed staffing complement for the Mechanism for 2019 would comprise 31 general temporary assistance positions (1 D-1, 3 P-4, 5 P-3, 3 P-2, 3 National Professional Officer, 9 Local level and 7 United Nations Volunteer), representing a net decrease of 10 positions compared with 2018. As cross-border deliveries from Jordan have been discontinued, with the final delivery using the Ramtha border crossing on 25 June 2018, the Secretary-General proposes restructuring the staffing of the Mechanism's team in Jordan. The proposed staffing requirements reflect a phased abolishment during January and February 2019: (a) in Amman, of nine positions (1 Team leader (P-5), 1 Monitoring Officer (P-4), 1 Security Officer (National Professional Officer), 1 Administrative Associate and 3 Driver (Local level) and 2 United Nations Volunteer); and (b) in Gaziantep, Turkey, of one position of Monitoring Support Officer (National Professional Officer). Of the remaining 31 positions, 21 would be located in Gaziantep, 8 in Dahuk, Iraq, 1 in New York and 1 in Amman. The estimated requirements for salaries and common staff costs amount to \$2,343,200. Upon enquiry, the Advisory Committee was informed that the savings resulting from the abolishment of the 10 positions were estimated at \$694,000.

8. With respect to the position of Team Leader (P-5) in Amman, the Advisory Committee was informed, upon enquiry, that the incumbent was a staff member on a fixed-term appointment at the P-4 level, who had assumed the higher-level (P-5) duties on 1 July 2015 until the abolishment of the position in December 2018. **The Committee notes with concern the “temporary” assignment of a staff member to a higher-level position for a lengthy period and reiterates its observation that all current and future vacant positions should be filled expeditiously and their recruitment process promptly completed (see, for example, [A/73/498](#), para. 20).**

9. With regard to the staffing requirements for the office in Amman, in view of the discontinuance of cross-border deliveries from Jordan, the Advisory Committee was informed, upon enquiry, that the office had, whether through reassignment or by not replacing staff upon contract expiration, already reduced its staffing complement by eight positions (1 Team Leader (P-5), 1 Monitoring Officer (P-4), 1 National Professional Officer, 3 Local level and 2 United Nations Volunteer). With respect to the sole position of Monitoring Officer (P-3) remaining in Amman, the Committee was informed that the incumbent would maintain standby operational preparedness and capacity in Jordan, liaise with the Jordanian authorities and key regional stakeholders and provide support to the Mechanism's other offices in Iraq and Turkey, as needed. The incumbent would be co-located with the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs regional office for the Syrian crisis. **The Committee considers that the continuation of a permanent presence in Amman is no longer merited. In the view of the Committee, any required support, if needed at this stage, may be provided by existing staff located at the Mechanism's offices in Iraq or Turkey or by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs regional office for the Syrian crisis in Amman. Therefore, the Committee recommends the abolishment, as at 30 June 2019, of the position of Monitoring Officer (P-3) in Amman. Any related operational costs should be adjusted, as appropriate.**

10. The Advisory Committee was informed that a vacancy factor of 5 per cent had been applied for all continuing international, national and United Nations Volunteer positions. Upon enquiry, the Committee was informed that the actual vacancy rate

was 12.2 per cent as at 31 December 2018, while the average vacancy rate for 2018 was 17.1 per cent. The Committee was also informed that vacancy rates for 2019 were expected to be lower owing to the reduction in staff following the discontinuance of cross-border operations from Jordan, as well as the start of cross-border operations from Iraq in March 2018 and the anticipated filling of all related positions. **The Committee considers that the aforementioned explanation should have been included in the report of the Secretary-General and trusts that such clarifications will be presented in future reports, as necessary.**

11. Subject to its observations above and the recommendation contained in paragraph 9, the Advisory Committee recommends approval of the proposed staffing requirements.

Non-staffing requirements

12. The Advisory Committee was informed that the main non-staffing requirements related to:

(a) General operating expenses (\$227,700), comprising the rental of premises in Iraq and Turkey (\$84,500); communications, including local and long-distance telephone calls, satellite phone subscriptions and Internet services (\$28,200); spare parts and maintenance for 10 vehicles (\$33,000); utilities and waste disposal services (\$18,000); maintenance services (\$18,500); bank charges (\$1,000); alteration, renovation and maintenance (\$3,000); freight and related costs for commercial freight of purchased equipment and shipments of items between the Mechanism's offices and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in Geneva (\$17,500); and general insurance for 10 vehicles and the registration of 3 vehicles being transferred from Jordan to Turkey (\$24,000);

(b) Travel of staff (\$275,000), comprising travel to the border crossings of Bab al-Hawa, Bab al-Salam and Ya'rubiyah (\$179,800); between the offices in Gaziantep and Dahuk for administrative and programme support; to Amman for coordination meetings; and of the Chief of the Mechanism to New York, Geneva, the Syrian Arab Republic and Lebanon (\$95,200);

(c) Grants and contributions (\$77,700), comprising the cost-shared contributions for Department of Safety and Security common security and radio room operations (\$13,500); remote mission support provided by the Service for Geospatial, Information and Telecommunications Technologies (\$42,700); and United Nations Development Programme support costs for recruitment and elements of administration of national staff and other administrative procedures (\$21,500).

13. The Advisory Committee was informed, upon enquiry, that the decrease under general operating expenses (\$41,000) compared with the expenditure in 2018 was mainly due to the reduction in the provision for the office in Jordan and would cover one month of office rent and utilities, as well as freight for the transfer of vehicles and equipment from Amman to Gaziantep.

Official travel

14. The proposed additional resource requirements for the travel of staff amount to \$275,000, compared with the estimated expenditure of \$299,200 for 2018. Upon enquiry, the Advisory Committee was informed that the requirements for the travel of staff included resources for the Chief to travel twice to Amman to support and supervise staff. The Committee was also informed, upon enquiry, that only 13.8 per cent of official travel had been undertaken in compliance with the advance ticket

purchase policy in 2018. Furthermore, the Committee considers, from the information provided to it, that the cost and justification, including for late booking, of a number of trips taken in 2018 were not clear, for example: (a) a 15-week trip costing \$18,784; (b) a 3-week trip costing \$9,835; and (c) a 7-week trip costing \$6,213.

15. **The Advisory Committee recalls that the General Assembly, on a number of occasions, has expressed concern at the low rate of compliance with the advance purchase policy directive. The Committee reiterates that stronger efforts are required, in particular in areas where travel can be better planned (see also [A/73/779](#), para. 16).**

16. **In view of the Advisory Committee's recommendation to abolish the remaining position in Amman (see para. 9 above), which would obviate the need for the Chief to travel for the purpose of supervising staff, and given the above-mentioned observations concerning the past management of resources for official travel, the Committee recommends a reduction of \$13,750, or 5 per cent, to the proposed resources for the travel of staff.**

17. **Subject to its observations above and the recommendations contained in paragraphs 9 and 16, the Advisory Committee recommends approval of the proposal of the Secretary-General for operational costs.**

Conclusion

18. **The actions requested of the General Assembly are set out in paragraph 21 of the report of the Secretary-General.**

19. **Subject to its observations and recommendations above, the Advisory Committee recommends that the General Assembly:**

(a) **Approve the proposed resources for the United Nations Monitoring Mechanism for the Syrian Arab Republic for 2019 in the amount of \$2,926,200 net (\$3,188,400 gross);**

(b) **Appropriate an additional amount of \$2,700,300 (net of staff assessment) under section 27, Humanitarian assistance, of the programme budget for the biennium 2018–2019, as well as an additional amount of \$259,200 under section 36, Staff assessment, to be offset by an equivalent amount under income section 1, Income from staff assessment, for the biennium 2018–2019.**