



Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

**UNDER-SECRETARY-GENERAL FOR HUMANITARIAN AFFAIRS AND  
EMERGENCY RELIEF COORDINATOR, STEPHEN O'BRIEN**

**Statement to the Security Council on the humanitarian situation in Syria**

New York, 27 July 2017

*As delivered by Assistant Secretary-General and Deputy Emergency Relief Coordinator Ursula Mueller*

Mr President and distinguished representatives,

On behalf of the Emergency Relief Coordinator, Mr. Stephen O'Brien, I thank you for the opportunity to brief you on the latest humanitarian developments in Syria. I speak to you from the OCHA office in Amman, Jordan. Earlier today, I had the opportunity to visit the Azraq Refugee camp, the second largest refugee camp in Jordan, after Za'tari camp. Around 35,000 Syrian refugees live in the camp, many for several years, and most of whom are women and children. About a quarter are originally from Aleppo and nearly 20 per cent from Homs.

My visit to Azraq camp left me with many impressions. First, it made clear the generosity and hospitality of Jordan and other neighbouring host countries, whose local authorities and communities have welcomed the influx of Syrian refugees despite the pressures it has placed on their own resources. Second, I saw the tremendous work of humanitarian organizations whose programming enables families not just to survive, but to lead dignified lives, even in the most difficult of circumstances.

Most of all, however, I was inspired by the incredible hope and strength of those who I met despite the terrible circumstances that have been forced upon them. Their message to me was clear and I pass it on to you today: what they want more than anything is for the guns to fall silent; the conflict to end; and for them to be able to go home when it is safe to do so.

Mr. President

The hope and strength found in Azraq is replicated across Syria. This is remarkable given that daily life remains dangerous and desperate for millions of people inside the country. While we continue to see a reduction of violence in some areas since the May 4<sup>th</sup> Memorandum on de-



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escalation, and particularly in Dar'a governorate in the last weeks, the humanitarian and protection situation remains extremely difficult for civilians in many parts of the country.

In the besieged area of eastern Ghouta in Rural Damascus and Jobar neighbourhood in Damascus city, military operations have started up again. In early and mid-July, airstrikes and shelling on Ain Tarma and Hazzeh towns reportedly killed and injured several people. A local market in the besieged town of Kafr Batna was hit by shelling on July 16<sup>th</sup>, resulting in death and injury to many civilians. On July 19<sup>th</sup>, mortar shelling on the Harasta Hospital in the eastern Ghouta suburb of Damascus reportedly injured one person and caused damage to the facility, another reminder that the scourge of attacks on civilian infrastructure in Syria continues unabated. Despite the announcement of a ceasefire for eastern Ghouta on 22 July, we have received reports of airstrikes on Arbin, Duma, Zamalka, and Otaya towns in the last three days, killing and injuring scores of civilians. Urgent efforts are needed to de-escalate the situation; and we call on the parties to ensure the protection of civilians and unimpeded humanitarian access.

In Idleb, infighting among non-State armed groups and designated terrorist groups in several towns over the last week has caused civilian casualties and led to rising tensions. On July 18<sup>th</sup>, four people were killed in a car bomb attack in Armanaz town and many more incidents have been reported. Some humanitarian partners have had to suspend activities as a result. The Bab Al-Hawa border crossing point on the Turkish border – a lifeline for civilians in north-western Syria – was temporarily closed due to the fighting and insecurity on the Syrian side of the border from July 19<sup>th</sup>-25<sup>th</sup>, although humanitarian and commercial shipments have since resumed. The situation in non-State armed groups-held areas of north-western Syria remains extremely worrying, particularly given the high level of need, with some one million displaced people living in the area, including many from formerly besieged areas.

Mr President,

Anti-ISIL operations continue in Raqqa governorate. Heavy fighting and airstrikes continue to result in civilian casualties and injuries. For example, reports indicate that dozens of civilians have been killed and injured due to airstrikes and shelling in July. Large-scale displacement also continues to be recorded, with over 30,000 people displaced since July 1<sup>st</sup>, bringing the total to over 200,000 since April 1<sup>st</sup> in Raqqa governorate. Significant protection concerns remain for those displaced, particularly in terms of freedom of movement outside of the camps they are hosted in. Humanitarian conditions are also very difficult for those displaced, particularly with temperatures approaching 50 degrees Centigrade.



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An estimated 20,000 to 50,000 people remain inside Raqqa city, which is now encircled, and their situation is perilous – there is no way for them to get out. Civilian movement out of the city remains extremely difficult due to the presence of mines and other unexploded ordnance, as well as shelling, sniper activities and airstrikes. As military operations continue, our concern is further civilian casualties; all the more so as ISIL has allegedly used civilians as human shields. As the Emergency Relief Coordinator noted last month, military actors must do everything in their power to see that civilians caught up in the fighting are protected.

The United Nations and partners are responding to those who have been displaced and we are ready to provide support in Raqqa city, as soon as access and security conditions allow. The health situation, particularly the low availability of trauma care services, is a major concern in view of the intense fighting and shifting frontlines. We continue to engage with relevant parties and actors on the ground to ensure that medical care is available to those who need it, but a lot more needs to be done.

Mr President,

The situation at the Berm on the Syrian-Jordanian border has also taken a worrying turn for the over 50,000 Syrian civilians stranded there. On 18 July, the explosion of an improvised explosive device in Al-Rukban camp reportedly killed three children and injured five others. Reports indicate that the Syrian army is now surrounding the area on the Syrian side following fierce battles between them and non-State armed groups. Given the desperate security and humanitarian situation, it is crucial that humanitarian programming to the area is regular and uninterrupted. We are also working hard with partners to identify a resolution for the people stranded in the Berm.

Mr President,

Let me turn now to the latest on humanitarian access to besieged and hard-to-reach areas. Unfortunately, there is not much positive news to report. There have been no convoys to besieged areas in July, although airdrops to Deir ez-Zor have continued. In terms of convoys to hard-to-reach areas, we are down to one convoy a week in July, reaching over 120,000 people in: Yalda, Babila and Beit Sahm in Rural Damascus; Al Houla and Harbanifseh; and Dar Kabira. Meanwhile, other humanitarian partners also delivered convoys from Damascus to hard-to-reach



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areas in July. This means, that under the United Nations June/July plan, we have so far reached just over a third of the one million people who were targeted.

The obstacles to convoys proceeding as planned are predictable: lack of approvals; lack of facilitation letters by the Government of Syria; other administrative delays; as well as insecurity and fighting. At the same time, arbitrary restrictions by some non-State armed groups, listed terrorist groups, and self-designated local authorities also continue to obstruct access in various ways, especially in Idleb and the eastern governorates of Syria. This means that, despite reductions in violence, we have not been able to noticeably increase our reach.

Mr President,

Despite the security and access challenges in reaching besieged and hard-to-reach areas, including the high threat to humanitarian workers, the United Nations and partners continue to implement one of the largest humanitarian operations in the world in Syria. Humanitarians continue to reach millions on a monthly basis. Latest data, and they are only available as of May, shows that humanitarians collectively reached 8.5 million people in a single month, including 4.4 million women and girls, and 4.1 million men and boys with multi-sector assistance.

Of particular note is the start of the Polio vaccination campaign this week by the World Health Organization, UNICEF and other health partners, which is targeting 450,000 children in Deir ez-Zor and Raqqa – so far, 27 polio cases have been confirmed. I call on all parties to ensure safety and access for the vaccination campaign teams. As you know, the Polio virus respects no borders, nor any political, religious or security affiliation and we must contain it.

This month marks the third anniversary of Security Council resolution 2165. Since then, the modality has been a success, with UN cross-border deliveries providing a lifeline for millions of people in nine governorates. With over 15,000 trucks monitored and confirmed by the United Nations Monitoring Mechanism during this period for the integrity of their consignments without incident, the importance of UN cross-border operations is surely beyond question. As it remains a vital lifeline to so many in need, this modality to deliver aid must be preserved in the months ahead.

Mr President, distinguished representatives,

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The conflict in Syria may be complex, but ensuring people are protected and supported is our imperative as humanitarians, and as human beings. None of us should stand silent while civilians suffer and while fear tactics and the denial of food, water, medical supplies, and other forms of aid are used as methods of war.

What we – and what the Syrian people – look to the Security Council and the international community for today: that all parties uphold their basic obligations under international humanitarian and human rights law, that there is protection of civilians; that there is an end to the attacks on civilian infrastructures; regular and unhindered access through all modalities, including for medical supplies; and, an end to the horrific practice of besiegement.

Thank you.