

**UNDER-SECRETARY-GENERAL FOR HUMANITARIAN AFFAIRS AND  
EMERGENCY RELIEF COORDINATOR MARK LOWCOCK**

**Statement to the Security Council on Syria**

*New York, 27 September 2017*

*As delivered*

Thank you, Mr. President.

It is an honour to speak to you this afternoon, for the first time since taking up my role as Emergency Relief Coordinator.

All of you around this table are aware of the devastating effects the conflict has had on civilians in Syria. I recognise the strenuous efforts many of you have made to promote improvements in the humanitarian situation. I know that, collectively, you have worked for increased humanitarian access and protection of civilians. And this remains high on the agenda of the international community, as we saw at the General Assembly last week. Humanitarian and protection needs remain both vast and acute across Syria. I pledge to work with you and with all sides to improve protection and to get aid to people in need.

Mr. President,

I welcome the continued progress in de-escalation, following the 4 May agreement signed by Russia, Turkey and Iran. These developments have had a positive impact on civilians in certain parts of south-west Syria, in rural Damascus, in north-west Homs as well as Idlib. And as my colleague, Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura, described in his statement, the last round of talks in Astana have set the stage for a further reduction in violence. Nevertheless, we continue to receive reports of violations of international humanitarian law by all parties to the conflict.

I am concerned about reports of recent fighting and airstrikes in Idleb and Hama, which have resulted in significant death and injury, and damaged critical civilian infrastructure. Reports suggest that an airstrike yesterday in the Wadi Al-Zeib area in rural Hama may have killed as many as 80 people fleeing ISIL. I am particularly concerned about reported airstrikes hitting schools and hospitals in Idleb. Humanitarian partners told us last week that three hospitals in Kafr Nabl, Khan Sheikhoun, and Heish sub-districts are no longer in service, leaving over half a million people without access to medical care. Such attacks result not only in direct human suffering from the attacks themselves, but they also cause unnecessary consequential suffering and death by depriving people of access to medical care for what would, otherwise, be treatable conditions.

Further to the east, battles against ISIL in Raqqa and Deir ez-Zor governorates have resulted in a spike in violence. As the Syrian Democratic Forces continue their advances inside Raqqa city, I am concerned about the estimated 14,000 civilians trapped there. They are squeezed into an ever-smaller area. Civilians need safe passage and access to life-saving assistance.

In Deir ez-Zor governorate, airstrikes in recent days have reportedly led to the death of scores of civilians, while ISIL is reportedly using civilians as human shields. Nearly 100,000 people from towns in the governorate, along the Euphrates, have reportedly been displaced due to the intense fighting since 25 August. More than 50,000 have been displaced in the last week alone. Many have been forced into other ISIL areas, out of the reach of relief organisations. And those who have been able to escape from fighting in these cities, by going north into Kurdish-controlled areas, continue to face restrictions on movement.

Mr. President,

As front lines continue to shift, humanitarian access to those in need is also changing. After three years of besiegement by ISIL, Government of Syria forces in early September gained access to Deir ez-Zor city. New commercial and humanitarian routes have been opened, as a result. The United Nations, through our partner the Syrian Arab Red Crescent, has been able to reach the area by road. That means we have been able to end the airdrops which, through 309 high-altitude rotations since April last year, dispatched more than 6,030 metric tons of food and supplies to those in need inside the city.

Following a comprehensive review by the United Nations, Deir ez-Zor and the 93,500 people in the city are being removed from the list of those besieged. 419,920 people, most of them, according to UNICEF, children, now remain besieged in 10 locations across Syria. Of these, 95 per cent are besieged by the Government of Syria, 2 per cent (in Foah and Kefraya) are besieged by non-State armed groups, and 3 per cent, in Yarmouk, by both non-State armed groups and the Government of Syria. While the numbers are reduced, the plight of those trapped remains severe. These sieges must be lifted.

Over a million people rely on assistance that is provided across conflict lines. We are still unable to reach the vast majority of them on a sufficiently regular basis. So far in September, 9,000 people in the three besieged towns of Foah, Kefraya and Yarmouk have been reached, and 25,000 people were reached in East Harasta, Misraba and Modira. In total, under the August and September access plan, we have reached just 280,500 of the 1.23 million people we requested to provide assistance to. There have been periods in the last 18 months when the UN has reached over 300,000 people in a single week. I would like to see such access replicated or surpassed in the future.

That will require overcoming constraints posed by bureaucratic delays and blockages by all sides. I note the first two meetings have taken place in Damascus of the tri-partite mechanism between the UN, the Government of Syria and the Russian Federation to provide a forum for administrative and security issues. These are practical developments that can improve the lives of Syrians.

Regular programming within Syria allows millions to be reached every month through the most direct routes. Inside Syria, regular programming reaches over four million people each month with food, medicine and other essential items.

Through cross-border programming from Jordan and Turkey, we reach millions more. Since the adoption of Council resolution 2165, the United Nations has dispatched more than 16,000 trucks, delivering health supplies sufficient for almost 15 million treatments, non-food items for almost four million people, and water, sanitation and hygiene support for three million people. Nearly a million people per month, on average, have been given help with food. As the Secretary General said in his monthly report, these operations complement the critical role played by international

and Syrian non-governmental organisations. In addition to the provision of aid, these organizations provide essential basic services, including education and health.

Mr. President,

The situation remains perilous for humanitarian workers in Syria, be they United Nations staff or our NGO partners, who face risks of violence every day. As reported to you by the Secretary-General in his monthly report, dozens of humanitarian workers have been killed since the start of the conflict, including staff members of the United Nations and staff members and volunteers of the Syrian Arab Red Crescent and the Palestine Red Crescent Society. More than 50 United Nations or UNRWA staff members are still detained or missing. International humanitarian law and human rights law set out the responsibilities of warring parties to ensure the necessary protection of all humanitarian organizations, including personnel, facilities and other relief assets. I count on this Council's vigilance and support to ensure the necessary protection of all humanitarian workers in Syria.

Mr. President,

At the Brussels Conference in April, some US\$6 billion was pledged by more than 40 governments to meet the humanitarian and longer-term needs of Syrians and host communities inside Syria and in the region. But the 2017 United Nations response plan remains substantially underfunded. I seek your renewed support to address that, and to see all pledges turned into contributions.

I have sought the agreement of the authorities to visit Syria in order to see the situation for myself and support the preparation of the 2018 humanitarian response plan, and then to advocate for resources for it.

Mr. President,

Syria continues to face deep and difficult challenges, and the Syrian people remain trapped in a cycle of violence that has to be broken. I will be working openly and transparently with all sides to find solutions that place the Syrian people at the centre of our collective focus. I look forward to working with you to get more help to them and provide them with better protection.

Thank you.