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**STATEMENT TO THE PRESS ON SYRIA
FRIDAY 28 MARCH**

Checked against delivery

Good afternoon everyone.

I would just like to make a very brief statement following my briefing to the Security Council on the humanitarian situation in Syria and what has been happening since Resolution 2139 was adopted a month ago.

As you know the Secretary-General presented his report earlier this week. I am not going to go into the detail of that report as you have already seen and commented on its contents.

I told the members of the Council today that the situation for millions of desperate people has not improved.

In fact conflict and violence have intensified over the past four weeks, with many people killed and injured. Since 22 February some 300 cases of sexual violence have been recorded in Damascus and Rural Damascus alone.

I am also very concerned that hundreds of thousands of people have been newly displaced from areas like eastern Aleppo and Yabroud in the south - driving them further from the reach of humanitarian assistance.

Just this week thousands of people are reported to have fled a rebel-led offensive near Kasab, close to the border with Turkey, including the Syrian-Armenian population, leading to growing concerns about sectarianism and the targeting of minority communities.

We have been able to provide some assistance through cross-line convoys including to areas where people had not had aid for months.

But in many situations the lack of security or those controlling checkpoints continue to prevent vital and basic aid from reaching people.

The first UN cross-border convoy for affected communities in al-Hassakeh entered Syria via the Nusaybin/Qamishly crossing point in the last week. The trucks carried food for 50,000 people, medicines for 60,000 and household items like blankets and clothing for over 60,000.

However, the humanitarian situation remains bleak, and will continue to be bleak, unless we are granted full and unhindered access, through the most efficient and direct means.

Only six per cent of the people living in besieged areas have received assistance in the past month.

I told the Council that we need to see a significant step-change in the speed and scale of humanitarian aid, if we are to save lives and keep pace with the ever-growing needs.

This piecemeal approach, despite the best efforts of humanitarian workers on the ground, is not delivering change fast enough.

The Council's Resolution was very clear.

The rules of International Humanitarian Law are also clear. The continued withholding of consent to cross-border or cross-line relief operations, particularly of commodities privileged throughout the Geneva Conventions - like food, water, medical treatment and supplies, or shelter - is arbitrary and unjustified.

I have consistently asked that all Council Members use their influence with the conflict parties to facilitate access for aid, to protect civilians and to lift the sieges.

Above all, their continued political efforts to help the parties find a way out of this crisis and bring hope to Syrian families are essential.

And I reiterated again my call for a political solution but also for the unhindered access that we need.

As the situation gets worse, not better, it is the ordinary men, women and children of Syria who continue to bear the brunt of this conflict, regardless of who they are, where they are from, or their religious beliefs.