

**UNDER-SECRETARY-GENERAL FOR HUMANITARIAN AFFAIRS AND  
EMERGENCY RELIEF COORDINATOR, VALERIE AMOS**

**SECURITY COUNCIL BRIEFING ON SYRIA**  
**New York, 15 December 2014**

*As delivered*

Mr. President,

My November briefing on the Syrian crisis focused on the constraints and challenges to humanitarian access across conflict lines inside Syria and across borders into Syria. In this month's briefing I would like to focus on issues related to the protection of civilians in Syria following the adoption of resolution 2139 in February this year.

The resolution was *unanimously* adopted in recognition of the magnitude of the human cost this conflict carries. The intention of the resolution was to seek protection for civilians caught in the midst of the fighting and to ensure that civilian facilities and infrastructure, for example hospitals and schools, were not attacked. The Security Council demanded that the parties to the conflict take *immediate* action to end the relentless violence and stop all violations of international humanitarian and human rights law.

Mr. President,

I regret to inform the Council that ten months later, the Council's strong demands have gone unheard. The parties to the conflict continue to ignore the most basic principles of humanity. In many parts of Syria the level of violence has worsened, with civilians continuing to pay heavily with loss of life, serious injuries, psychological trauma, ongoing and recurring displacement and massive damage to property and infrastructure.

In February, it was estimated that 100,000 people had been killed. Today, the UN estimates that number is closer to 200,000 with around one million people injured. And the numbers increase daily.

Some 12.2 million Syrians now require humanitarian assistance, an increase of 2.9 million people in only ten months. Almost half of the Syrian population is displaced with more than 7.6 million IDPs and well over three million refugees in neighbouring countries. A fifth of the number of people displaced worldwide.

Mr. President,

Every time we use a new figure in relation to the Syrian crisis we say that it is unprecedented. We have run out of words to fully explain the brutality, violence and callous disregard for human life which is a hallmark of this crisis. The international community has become numb to its impact with the vast numbers, regional reach and sense of political impasse.

Mr. President,

The Council made a number of specific calls in resolution 2139.

A call for the end to the indiscriminate use of weapons. However, all parties to the conflict continue to violate this most basic of laws with devastating consequences. The Government has continued to use barrel bombs in densely populated areas, killing and maiming people. The use of barrel bombs has been particularly acute in Aleppo, Hama, Idlib, Rural Damascus, Deir Ez-Zor, Ar-Raqqa and Da'ra. In the first five months following resolution 2139, Human Rights Watch documented over 650 major new damaged sites, consistent with the use of barrel bombs on neighbourhoods in the city of Aleppo alone. Armed opposition groups, and designated terrorist organisations, have also used explosive weapons, including mortars and car bombs, in populated areas, killing civilians.

Resolution 2139 explicitly condemns grave violations and abuses committed against children, and condemns all forms of sexual and gender based violence. Yet, today Syria is one of the most dangerous places on earth to be a child. In February, around four million children were particularly vulnerable and in need of international assistance. Today, over 5.6 million children are in need of immediate assistance. Children have been murdered, tortured and subjected to sexual violence by all parties to the conflict. Reports of children killed or publicly executed, crucified, beheaded and stoned to death, particularly by ISIL, have increased in recent months. Millions of children have been traumatised by the horrors they have been forced to witness. We have also seen a trend of children receiving military training and weapons. Being used in combat roles, younger and younger. Reports have been received of 350 children, some as young as five years old, being trained for combat in a military camp in Ar-Raqqa.

As I have reported on many occasions this conflict is not only shattering Syria's present; it is also destroying its future.

Reports of sexual and gender based violence have increased since July, particularly but not exclusively, perpetrated by ISIL. Recently, Kurdish refugees from Kobani reported the capture of young girls by ISIL for sexual purposes.

Girls as young as twelve.

Reports of early and forced marriage are also on the rise. This is in part due to a depletion of family resources, and more recently because parents are terrified of their unmarried daughters being forced to marry ISIL fighters in areas under their control. Women captured as slaves by ISIL have been sold in markets in Ar-Raqqa. Some are sold to individual men, others are kept by ISIL in rest houses and face multiple rapes by fighters returning from the battlefield. As noted by

the Commission of Inquiry, ISIL has carried out mass victimisation of civilians, including murder, enslavement, rape, forcible displacement and torture and has violated its obligations toward civilians and persons hors de combat, amounting to war crimes.

In resolution 2139, the Security Council demanded the immediate end to the practice of arbitrarily detaining people and the use of torture in detention centres. Despite this, tens of thousands of civilians continue to be arbitrarily detained and subjected to systematic and cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment and torture. The majority are males taken at checkpoints or during ground raids. The Commission of Inquiry continues to receive reports of severe torture and beatings in Government detention facilities. Detainees are often held in overcrowded, unsanitary conditions without adequate food, water and healthcare. Reports of detainees dying from torture and malnutrition continue. The Commission has also reported on armed opposition groups taking people hostage, including women and children. People are held under conditions that constitute cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

Mr. President,

In resolution 2139, the Security Council demanded that all parties respect the principle of medical neutrality and desist from attacks against civilian objects. Despite this call, the deliberate and indiscriminate damage to essential services, including hospitals, schools and infrastructure, have become a regular occurrence. In the last ten months, accounts of damage to water systems and electricity have continued to be reported, with large parts of cities cut off from receipt of basic services.

Hospitals across the country have been attacked. Between the adoption of the resolution and the end of November, Physicians for Human Rights has documented 70 attacks on medical facilities, 60 of them by government forces. In the same period 150 deaths of medical personnel were reported. 97 of them killed in the line of duty. The passage of medical assistance to hard-to-reach locations continues to be hindered by the lack of approvals from the Government of Syria. Opposition groups have also prevented medical supplies from reaching besieged communities in Nubul and Zarah. The Government continues to withdraw medicines, medical equipment and supplies including for surgical interventions, such as antibiotics and injectable medicines, from UN convoys. Hospitals continue to be militarized by the parties to the conflict.

Schools, which should be safe places for children to learn and grow, have been bombed from the air, subjected to mortar fire and been attacked with car bombs. In the last nine months, the UN has verified at least 35 attacks on or near schools, killing over 105 children. The actual number of schools attacked is likely to be higher.

And parties to the conflict continue to use siege as a weapon of war, deliberately denying people access to basic assistance such as food and medicines. At the passing of resolution 2139 in February, there were 220,000 people besieged by either Government or opposition forces. 212,000 remain besieged today; 185,500 people by Government forces and 26,500 people by opposition forces.

Many of these communities have been besieged for years.

No one allowed out, no aid allowed in. For years.

And there is now a new tactic as we have seen in Yarmouk. Tiny amounts of aid allowed in, giving people hope, but so little it can only help a fraction of those in need. People's hopes raised and then dashed. Time and time again.

Despite the Security Council's continued call to lift the sieges only two locations have seen an end to such practices, Homs old city and Moadamiyah. The UN and its partners have only been allowed to deliver to an average of five percent of people besieged each month with food and medicine since resolution 2139 was passed.

Mr. President,

Even in war there are rules. Denial of medical assistance or the use of starvation as a weapon of war is prohibited by International Law.

In February I appealed to the Council to use its influence on parties to protect civilians and demand greater humanitarian access. In adopting resolution 2139, this Council committed itself and the wider international community to the well-being and the protection of the people of Syria.

Today I appeal again to Council members to ensure that the parties heed its call and comply with resolution 2139 in its entirety;

- To end the indiscriminate use of weapons in populated areas. This practice is responsible for a large proportion of the growing casualties. It is disproportionate and a violation of international law.
- To protect children from the wide range of violations they are subject to. Parties to the conflict can make a clear direction to those who fight that committing crimes against children is unacceptable and will not be tolerated.
- To lift the sieges and allow people access to assistance essential to their survival
- To facilitate unhindered humanitarian access including for medical assistance and respect the neutrality of medical facilities. This is expressly outlined as a basic premise of the Geneva Conventions.
- To hold the parties to account and end the pervasive climate of impunity

And most importantly, this Council and the international community must find a political end to this conflict, once and for all.

Thank you.