



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 Syria**

**New York, 16 September 2015**

*As Delivered*

Mr. President,

The recent images of the three year old boy, Aylan Kurdi, lying lifeless on a beach in Turkey encapsulates the profound and prolonged desperation of the Syrian people, too long exposed to the horrors of a brutal and savage conflict. I recount the words of Abdullah Kurdi, Aylan's father, who said: "I tried to catch my children and my wife but there was no hope. One by one, they died." Tragically, far too many Syrian families have spoken similar words over the last five years. It is civilians who continue to bear the brunt of this war.

As the plight of Syrian refugees desperately trying to reach Europe in recent weeks has shown, the effects of the Syria crisis are not just national or regional, but global in nature. The conflict in Syria has propelled one of the largest refugee exoduses since the Second World War. These refugees are fleeing for their lives from war and violence, and have a right to seek asylum without any form of discrimination. As an international community, it is our responsibility to support the neighbouring countries who shoulder most of the burden.

At the same time, stronger efforts must be made to address the root causes that force people to leave their homes and seek asylum abroad, addressing the 'flee or die' response natural to each and every one of us faced with peril or a challenge to our survival. For Syria, it should be clear to all that this means a political settlement that brings an end to the crisis.

In the absence of such a political solution, this Council passed resolution 2139 in February 2014 which demanded action by the parties in a number of areas, including an end to attacks against civilians and civilian infrastructure, and facilitating unhindered humanitarian access. I deeply regret to inform the Council that, some 18 months later, the Council's strong demands continue to go unheeded. By any measure, human suffering in Syria has worsened, not diminished.

Over the past month, violence has continued throughout the country. There has been no reduction in the appalling patterns of violations of international humanitarian law and human rights law. Indiscriminate attacks, including with explosive weapons, continue to cause widespread death and destruction. For example, between 17 and 26 August, Government forces repeatedly attacked residential areas in Douma, Rural Damascus, killing at least 90 civilians and wounding nearly 300 more. Meanwhile, in the last week of August, non-State armed groups

launched hundreds of shells on civilian-populated areas of Damascus and Rural Damascus, killing at least 20 civilians and injuring many more, while yesterday, shelling by non-State armed groups on civilian populated areas of Aleppo killed at least 33 people, including women and children, and injured over 150 more people.

Allegations of attacks with chemical agents continue to be received. The joint OPCW-UN Mechanism established by Security Council resolution 2235 (2015) is the relevant body to investigate these allegations.

Mr. President,

The deliberate targeting of civilian infrastructure continues to occur with alarming frequency. Attacks by non-State armed groups have resulted in significant disruption to municipal water and electricity networks in Aleppo, Damascus and Dar'a over the past weeks and months. Most recently, some two million people were without water in Aleppo city for two weeks in August. Deliberately depriving families and communities of water and electricity only serves to worsen humanitarian conditions, and drive ordinary Syrians into greater despair and desperation.

Hospitals and medical facilities continue to be attacked. In August, Physicians for Human Rights documented 12 attacks on medical facilities while 15 medical workers were killed. Since the start of 2014, there have been 169 attacks on medical facilities and 252 medical workers have been killed. Attacks on such facilities have had a multiplier effect, not only killing and injuring, but also destroying the healthcare system as a whole, leaving many Syrians unable to obtain the most basic levels of care.

Schools, which should be safe places for children to learn and grow, continue to be attacked. Since the start of 2014, the United Nations has verified at least 84 attacks on or near schools, although the actual number of schools attacked is likely higher. One in four schools cannot be used because they have been damaged, destroyed, or are being used as shelters for the internally displaced or for military purposes.

Deliberate attacks on hospitals and schools are war crimes. All parties will unquestionably be held to account now and however far into the future it takes after investigation and due judicial process.

Mr. President,

I have spoken before about the impact of the conflict on Syria's children and young people, but it does bear repeating once again. Today, Syria is one of the most dangerous places on earth to be a child. Over 5.6 million children are in need of immediate assistance. Although the school year commenced this past week, over two million children – that's one out of every three - are not in school in Syria, and an additional 450,000 children are at risk of dropping out. We are extremely concerned about hundreds of thousands of children in ISIL-controlled areas forced to follow a curriculum designed by the designated terrorist group.

According to reports by the Commission of Inquiry and others, children are murdered, tortured and subjected to sexual violence by all parties to the conflict. Millions of children have been traumatized by the horrors they have witnessed. Young people have few prospects. The conflict

is not only destroying Syria's present, but it is also destroying its future – one missing cohort of educated young people will soon become two cohorts.

Mr. President,

Despite the volatile and insecure environment, the United Nations and NGO partners continue to deliver life-saving assistance to millions of people in need. In the past month alone, 4.2 million people received food aid; medicines and supplies for 1.1 million treatments were dispatched; and nearly 450,000 received relief items and other support. We should all recognize the commitment and bravery of the thousands of workers who deliver much-needed aid at great personal risk, particularly Syrian organizations and volunteers who are often the first responders on the front lines.

While we are reaching a significant number of people, we are still unable to deliver sufficient quantities of aid to people in the hardest-to-reach areas. Fighting and insecurity hamper our ability to respond. For example, during August, the World Food Programme was unable to reach over one million people in Rural Damascus, Rural Homs and Rural Hama. A further 750,000 people in ISIL-controlled areas cannot be reached with food due to safety concerns.

In addition to insecurity, the parties to the conflict continue to place restrictions that limit or obstruct where, to whom and how often we deliver assistance. Some 422,000 people continue to live under the most intolerable siege conditions, unable to leave their communities, and we are largely unable to get in to deliver much needed humanitarian assistance. Over the last three months, only nine per cent of people in besieged areas per month have received much-needed health assistance from the United Nations, while no food or other basic relief supplies have entered these areas despite the overwhelming need.

Approval for 46 requests for inter-agency convoys remains pending with the Government of Syria. If approved, the United Nations could reach an additional 1.2 million people in desperate need of assistance. Meanwhile, Government-approved convoys to Nubul and Zahra, Afrin in Aleppo and to Foah and Kefrayah in Idlib have been stalled by the lack of approval by non-State armed groups for safe passage.

There can be no justification for deliberately obstructing humanitarian access and depriving civilians of access to services essential to their survival.

On a more positive note, I welcome the recent progress on the visas in August, with the Government of Syria granting 109 visas for United Nations staff members from 12 different offices. 96 per cent of the visa applications submitted in August were approved during the same month. I very much hope this trend will continue, not only with the visas, but also for other administrative obstacles.

Mr. President,

The lack of funding for humanitarian operations continues to be a major challenge. We require some \$738 million dollars to fund essential life-saving operations until the end of this calendar year in Syria. I appreciate the generosity of donors in 2015 already and ask them to consider making additional pledges, given the extraordinary level of need we are facing.

We are running out of words to describe the utter disregard for human life and dignity that has become the hallmark of this crisis. Every day that passes, more Syrian children, women and men die. Millions more are forced to live in appalling conditions where there is no safe refuge in their country; where their basic needs for protection are unmet; where their fundamental rights are trampled upon; and where their futures and that of their country appear increasingly bleak.

While the parties to this conflict are responsible for upholding their obligations under international law, the members of the Security Council and other Member States with influence can and must do more to demand that the indiscriminate violence stops, that sieges are lifted, that civilian infrastructure is respected, and that vital humanitarian assistance reaches all areas of the country without delay.

But above all else, this Council must focus its efforts on finding a political solution. I call again on this Council to set aside their differences and to work together to finally bring an end to this nightmare for the Syrian people. As bestowed by the UN Charter, the Security Council has an inescapable responsibility to help the Syrian people realize a future of peace. I very much hope that – for the sake of the people of Syria – a political solution is found as soon as possible.

Thank you.