



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 November 2015**

Madam President,

I would like to begin my intervention by expressing my deepest condolences to those affected by the recent ISIL attacks in France and Lebanon.

Madam President,

The Syria crisis is a chronicle of missed opportunities by the Security Council, Member States with influence on the parties, and the broader international community to bring the conflict to an end. More than five years since the unrest in Syria began; parties to the conflict continue to commit unthinkable atrocities on a daily basis, plunging Syria and its citizens deeper into darkness.

I very much welcome the recent international talks in Vienna. This momentum must be seized to leave no stone unturned to put an end to this horrendous war that has cost an estimated 250,000 people their lives, given rise to extremist and terrorist groups, and reduced much of the country, a middle-income country, to rubble. The fighting has also propelled the world's largest humanitarian crisis of the twenty-first century, with some 13.5 million people in Syria in need of some form of humanitarian assistance, including six million children, and driven over four million people to seek safe refuge outside their home country.

The neighbouring countries are shouldering most of the burden with remarkable generosity and sacrifice. Yet, many Syrians – who have lost hope, and are fleeing unspeakable violence and whose resources are all but depleted – are willing to risk their life in perilous journeys across the Mediterranean: some 400,000 people – that's over 50 per cent of the arrivals by sea in 2015 - are Syrian. And still they flee – yesterday; today; and without a political settlement, tomorrow and the day after, and the day after that – each day, even as winter approaches and I simply predict all through it.

Security Council members and the international community must also redouble their efforts to oblige the parties to comply finally with the demands made by this Council in resolutions 2139, 2165 and 2191. As we have sat at this Council chamber month after month, we have borne witness to all parties to the conflict failing to protect civilians. Each month, I speak of what seems like never ending violence killing innocent civilians, including children.

The indiscriminate use of weapons continues unabated in the Syria conflict. In October, hundreds of civilians were killed or injured in direct or indiscriminate attacks by all parties, due to the continued use of explosive weapons in populated areas, including through barrel bombs and other aerial weapons, shelling and car bombs.

On 30 October, several airstrikes hit the al-Hal market in Douma, Rural Damascus, killing at least 60 civilians and injuring 200 more. The day before, airstrikes reportedly hit the main field hospital in Douma killing at least 15 civilians and injuring 50 others. Following these attacks, Jaish al-Islam reportedly used dozens of prisoners as human shields, placed in cages around heavily populated areas to seek to deter further airstrikes in civilian areas.

Elsewhere, just a few days ago, on 10 November, more than 23 people were killed and 40 injured when non-State armed opposition groups caused two explosions in Lattakia city.

Meanwhile, ISIL and other terrorist and extremist groups continue to cause carnage across the country. For example, in Aleppo governorate, ISIL detonated a vehicle-borne improvised explosive device (VBIED) in Hritan, killing more than 20 people in early October.

Such indiscriminate attacks are not only a tragedy which kill and injure innocent people; they may amount to war crimes. And the perpetrators must be aware that they will one day be held accountable for their actions.

The pace of displacement in Syria remains relentless. In Aleppo, at least 50,000 people are confirmed to have been displaced since early October following an escalation of fighting between non-State armed opposition groups and the Government of Syria. This number could be as high as 100,000. ISIL attacks on Mahin and Hawarin in eastern rural Homs in late October has led to the displacement of an estimated 25,000 people. Further displacement is expected to continue at a similar rate unless there is a reduction in the violence.

Attacks on civilian infrastructure also continue unabated, including relentless attacks against health care facilities and personnel across the country. According to the Physicians for Human Rights, in October there were 16 attacks on medical facilities – the highest in a single month since the conflict began – and seven medical staff were killed. Parties to the conflict must ensure respect for, and protection of, health facilities, personnel and patients under international humanitarian law. Meanwhile, medicines and medical supplies continue to be prevented from reaching those who desperately need them.

The overall impact on the health situation has been devastating, with many civilians, particularly in areas not controlled by the Government, unable to access even the most basic medical care and the routine immunization coverage in Syria has dropped from 95 per cent in 2010 to 64 per cent in 2015, and in some places is as low as 20 per cent. This poses an acute risk for deadly epidemic disease in many areas. Surely, meeting

the health needs of children who represent our future should be considered as a lowest common denominator of our humanity.

We need a firm commitment from the parties to the conflict to take all necessary measures to protect civilians and to stop the targeting of civilian infrastructure, including medical facilities, schools, and key infrastructure networks.

In spite of repeated calls by this Council, humanitarian actors continue to be prevented from gaining sustained, unhindered access to millions of people in need. While active conflict and insecurity are a limiting factor, the parties continue to delay or obstruct assistance to people in need. We have only been able to reach a small proportion of the 4.5 million people in need in hard-to-reach areas in 2015. Nearly half of those in need in hard-to-reach areas – some 2.2 million – are living under terror and subjugation in ISIL-controlled areas, to which the United Nations and our partners continues to have virtually no access. We must spare no effort to ensure these people receive the assistance they desperately need.

The parties to the conflict continue to use siege as a war tactic, with an estimated 393,700 people living under siege. This includes some 200,000 people in Deir-ez-Zor city by ISIL; some 181,200 people by the Syrian Government in various locations in eastern Ghutah, as well as Darayya and Zabadani in Rural Damascus; and some 12,500 people by non-State armed opposition groups and the Nusra Front in Foah and Kefraya in Idlib. These people have next to no access to the basic essentials of life and our ability to reach them is extremely limited. So far in 2015, the United Nations has only been able to reach 3.5 per cent of the people with health assistance and only 0.7 per cent of people with food per month in besieged areas. Such an inhumane tactic of war is unlawful and must it end immediately.

As I have said to this Council before, we need to make urgent progress to reach people in hard-to-reach and besieged areas as living conditions in these areas continue to deteriorate and the onset of winter is not far away. So far this year, only 30 per cent of the convoy requests made by the United Nations have been approved in principle by the Syrian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and less than half of those approved have been able to actually proceed due to a combination of lack of final security clearances from Syrian authorities, lack of safe passage from non-State armed opposition groups, and insecurity.

I call upon the Syrian authorities to urgently approve the 46 currently pending inter-agency convoy requests and allow convoys previously agreed in principle which are awaiting their clearance to proceed. I also call on non-State armed opposition groups as well as listed terrorist groups to allow the deliveries they are preventing. Over 1.4 million people in hard-to-reach and besieged locations would be assisted if these convoys were able to proceed. The planned humanitarian airlift to Deir ez-Zor, although approved, has been unable to proceed due to the deteriorating security situation around the airport.

Despite all the challenges, the United Nations and partners continue to reach millions of people in need through all modalities. In the past month alone, the United Nations and its partners delivered food aid to over four million people; water, sanitation and hygiene support to over 3.5 million; and medicines and supplies for 717,000 treatments. The commitment and bravery of the thousands of aid workers who deliver

much-needed aid at great personal risk are deeply humbling, particularly Syrian organizations, the Syrian Arab Red Crescent and volunteers who are often the first responders on the front lines.

I once again stress the need for the United Nations to be able to use all modalities – across conflict lines and across borders – in order to reach people in need in Syria wherever they may be found. Resolutions 2165 and 2191 have made a difference by enabling the United Nations and partners to reach some people in need who were largely inaccessible before. Through cross border deliveries, the United Nations and partners have been able to regularly reach millions of people. This complements the crucial work of international non-government actors who continue to provide large-scale assistance across the country. We remain committed to reaching all those in need and we need any and every route possible to do this.

The status quo simply cannot continue in Syria. We have seen the devastating consequences of failing to act. This failure has eroded confidence in the international community. The people of Syria deserve more than the discussions we are having or the aid we are providing: they deserve an end to this senseless violence.

The recent international talks in Vienna provide a glimmer of light that international diplomacy can provide a solution to the conflict. We must take advantage of this rare moment of diplomatic opportunity to push for a negotiated political solution and create the conditions for a nationwide ceasefire. At the same time this new diplomatic momentum should be used to generate early dividends for the Syrian people. Most immediately, I urge the Council and relevant Member States to use their influence to press for an end to the use of indiscriminate weapons and to take steps to ensure unhindered humanitarian access to all people in need throughout Syria.

And I sincerely hope that progress will be made and that the incoming year finally sees an end to the conflict in Syria.

We simply cannot squander this moment or momentum: all of us must stand up and play our part to bring an end to this conflict for once and for all.

Thank you.