

United Nations



Nations Unies

Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY- GENERAL FOR HUMANITARIAN AFFAIRS AND
DEPUTY EMERGENCY RELIEF COORDINATOR KYUNG-WHA KANG**

SECURITY COUNCIL BRIEFING ON SYRIA

New York, 21 December 2015

Checked against delivery

Madam President,
Distinguished members of the Security Council,

On behalf of the Emergency Relief Coordinator, Mr. Stephen O'Brien, I thank you for this opportunity to brief you on the latest developments in Syria.

Since the adoption of resolution 2139 in February 2014 and resolution 2165 in July 2014, this Council has been briefed month after month on the suffering of the Syrian people. We have repeatedly described in detail the countless and blatant violations of the basic tenets of international humanitarian and human rights law. For nearly five years, we have watched as Syria sank deeper and deeper into violence and brutality. And yet, no words can do justice to the despair and devastation that millions of Syrians experience every day.

The Emergency Relief Coordinator, Stephen O'Brien, visited Syria from 12 to 14 December to find ways to improve the ongoing response efforts. I myself recently visited the cross-border hubs in Jordan and Turkey.

During his mission, the ERC visited the Al-Waer neighbourhood of Homs city where a cessation of hostilities was reached. This agreement has allowed the humanitarian community to deliver assistance to all 60,000 people in Al-Waer, whom the United Nations had not been able to reach since January 2015. This is a welcome development that demonstrates what can be done when an agreement is reached between the parties. We are encouraged by this but reiterate that humanitarian access should be unhindered and sustained at all times, and not be made conditional on negotiated agreements.

The case of Al-Waer highlights the severe needs of many of the 4.5 million people living in hard-to-reach areas, of whom nearly 400,000 are besieged. From September to November 2015 because of imposed access restrictions and insecurity, the United Nations and its partners reached only 32 per cent of the hard-to-reach locations. Similarly, during the same period, parties to the conflict continued to heavily restrict access to besieged areas. As a result, only some 1 per cent of the besieged population received food assistance and less than 1 per cent health assistance. This is simply unacceptable. We once again call upon the Syrian authorities to approve the 47 pending inter-agency convoy requests and allow

convoys previously agreed in principle to proceed. I also call on non-State armed groups, as well as listed terrorist groups, to allow the deliveries they are preventing from proceeding.

Cross-border operations authorized by this Council have had a significant impact on improving humanitarian access, bringing life-saving assistance to millions of people in desperate need. As of 30 November, this included food assistance for over 2.4 million people, medical supplies for 4.1 million treatments and non-food items for 1.6 million people. We are very grateful for the cooperation and support of the Jordanian and Turkish authorities who have made this possible.

However, we are deeply concerned at the escalation of ground fighting and airstrikes, reportedly by Syrian and allied forces, in the northern part of the country and their impact on civilians and civilian infrastructure. Several hospitals, markets and bakeries have been hit, and scores of civilian deaths and injuries are reported almost on a daily basis. The doctors who work to save them have become a target and they fear that the Red Cross and Red Crescent emblems are no longer the shield of protection that they must be. The violence has also disrupted the provision of humanitarian assistance.

Just yesterday, six airstrikes hit a busy market place, several public buildings and residential areas in Idleb City Center. Rescue workers stated that 43 people were confirmed dead and around 30 more bodies are yet to be identified. According to preliminary reports, at least five aid workers were killed in the attack while performing their duties in Idleb. One White Helmets' staff was killed while driving an ambulance carrying injured people to a nearby medical facility. This loss of innocent lives and wanton indiscriminate destruction of populated areas is an outrage, and those responsible must be held accountable. One NGO suspended all activities as of 21 December as its WASH programme manager was killed during the airstrikes on Idleb City. Since late September, at least five international NGOs suspended operations in November.

Since the start of this crisis, Physicians for Human Rights have documented 336 attacks on at least 240 medical facilities and the death of 697 medical personnel. These attacks are flagrant violations of international humanitarian law and an affront to the core of our shared humanity that must be guarded – caring for the wounded and the sick. I plead with the parties to the conflict to ensure the protection of health facilities, workers and patients under international humanitarian law. Similarly the removal of surgical supplies and trauma kits from convoys by the Syrian Government must end.

In Al-Waer, the Emergency Relief Coordinator visited one of the hundreds of hospitals in Syria that have been either damaged or entirely destroyed during the conflict. The hospital lacked all basic supplies. Without any blood bags, transfusions were made directly from a donor to a patient, placing patients at a considerable risk of contracting infectious diseases.

Madame President,

Over the past month, violence has continued to escalate and intensify across Syria. Indiscriminate attacks by all parties to the conflict resulted in loss of life, destruction of infrastructure and the denial of access to basic service of thousands of people. On 13 December, eight students and four staff were killed when an elementary school was reportedly hit in Duma in Eastern Ghouta. A month earlier, on 12 November, eight civilians, including six children, were reportedly injured when a mortar struck a school in Bab Touma neighbourhood of Damascus.

We again remind all parties to this conflict on their responsibility to protect civilians and civilian infrastructure. In particular, as the Syrian skies become more crowded, we urge all forces carrying out airstrikes to comply with this basic principle that is enshrined in international humanitarian law.

Contamination due to explosive remnants of war is also a major challenge in many parts of the country, and there is a critical need for the clearance of explosive hazards in Syria. This is an immediate, life-saving priority, and the humanitarian partners courageously undertaking this work need our urgent support.

Civilian displacement, which is a defining characteristic of the crisis in Syria, continued at a relentless pace over the past month. More than 121,000 people had to flee their homes in nine governorates, many of them for the second or the third time. Over half of the total population in Syria has been displaced since the beginning of this crisis with some 6.5 million people displaced internally. Nearly 4.3 million people have fled the country, with neighboring countries in the region bearing an enormous burden.

Under extremely challenging circumstances, humanitarian partners continue to reach millions of people every month with life-saving assistance. But much more is needed. The humanitarian community has recently finalized a Humanitarian Response Plan for 2016 asking for nearly \$3.2 billion to provide life-saving assistance to the 13.5 million people in need inside the country. The Plan sets out a joint framework for the response efforts based on prioritized needs across the different sectors. As 2015 draws to an end, the response inside the country is only 42 per cent funded. I call on all partners to contribute generously towards these plans in preparation for the upcoming conference, 'Supporting Syria and the Region, London 2016'. Only with your help can we assist those in need inside Syria and in the neighboring countries.

Madame President,

In a rehabilitation center at the Turkish border, I saw the deep trauma in the eyes of Syrian girls and boys who had lost arms and legs in violent attacks. One young man had only an arm left. I also saw the commitment and courage of the doctors and nurses who were earnestly trying to help them back to life, physically and mentally. Together, they were emblematic of their country and people - broken in so many ways but still desperately and defiantly struggling to hold on to life.

As we enter a new year, we must do our utmost to bring hope back to Syrians who have suffered too much. The conflict must be brought to an end through a comprehensive political solution addressing its underlying causes. We pin our hopes on the efforts of the International Support Group for Syria (ISSG), and are encouraged by the resolution that this Council adopted on 18 December.

May I reiterate the call made by the Secretary-General to the ISSG while welcoming the Council resolution, to apply the necessary pressure on the Syrian parties to immediately implement the following confidence-building measures: to stop the use of indiscriminate weapons against civilians, including barrel bombs; to allow unconditional and unimpeded access for aid convoys; to halt attacks on medical and educational facilities, and to lift all restrictions on medical and surgical supplies from humanitarian convoys; and to release all detainees.

It is our earnest hope that this Council in support of the ISSG has started to pave the way to peace in Syria.

Thank you.