

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

SECURITY COUNCIL BRIEFING ON SYRIA
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Mr. President,

We are in the fifth year of a war in Syria characterized by breathtaking levels of savagery and it is just over one year since this Council adopted resolution 2139. The resolution demanded action by the parties to the conflict, to cease attacks against civilians and facilitate humanitarian access to those in need. We had all hoped that the resolution would compel the parties to reduce the violence and lead to a significant improvement in the situation of people in Syria.

By any measure, however, the situation in Syria has dramatically worsened.

Civilians continue to bear the brunt of this conflict. The Secretary-General has submitted report after report highlighting the failure of the parties to meet their basic minimum legal obligations. Indiscriminate aerial bombings, including the use of barrel bombs, car bombs, mortar attacks, unguided rockets and the use of other explosive devices in populated areas, are the hallmarks of this conflict.

Fighting continues to escalate across the country. Increased violence in Idlib city in the past few days is particularly worrying and has the potential to displace hundreds of thousands more people. I am concerned that civilians could become trapped in the city if the fighting escalates. People must be given safe passage and be allowed to leave if this becomes necessary.

Mr. President,

I have previously reported on the worsening socio-economic situation in the country which has eroded the development gains made over a generation. Today, a Syrian's life expectancy is estimated to be 20 years less than when the conflict started. Unemployment is around 58 per cent, up from around 10 per cent in 2010; and nearly two thirds of all Syrians are now estimated to be living in extreme poverty.

Mr. President,

The inability of this Council and countries with influence over the different parties at war in Syria, to agree on the elements for a political solution in the country, means that the humanitarian consequences will continue to be dire for millions of Syrians.

Children are particularly badly affected with 5.6 million children now in need of assistance. Well over two million children are out of school. A quarter of Syria's schools have been damaged, destroyed or taken over for shelter. It will take billions of dollars to repair damaged schools and restore the education system.

Nutritional surveys indicate a worrying decline in the nutritional status of children. Three governorates – Hama, Aleppo and Deir-ez-Zor – have Global Acute Malnutrition rates above 10 percent among the children sampled: a level considered as “serious” according to WHO standards. The overall country-wide Global Acute Malnutrition Rate was 7.2 per cent. This is considered to be “poor”.

The health system in Syria has been destroyed. Only half of the network of primary health centers which existed before the conflict are still working. Physicians for Human Rights has documented 233 attacks on 183 medical facilities, with 610 medical staff killed over the last four years.

Basic services continue to be deliberately attacked and cut. For example, some 450,000 people in Dar'a had their water cut for two weeks in February. And even when basic services are restored, people only have sporadic access due to the systemic degradation of basic infrastructure. NGOs reviewing satellite imagery report that 83 per cent of the lights have gone out in Syria over the past four years. This is an average. The cuts are even higher in areas like Aleppo.

As needs grow humanitarian organizations need to reach more people, but we are facing increasing difficulties in reaching the 4.8 million people who live in areas which are hard to reach. And as the violence escalates and conflict lines continue to shift, I fear that these numbers will rise. Access continues to be constrained by insecurity and active fighting but the parties to the conflict are increasingly, deliberately obstructing the delivery of life-saving aid.

In parts of the country under ISIL control, a number of humanitarian offices have been closed. As a result WFP was forced to halt distribution to 700,000 people in ISIL-controlled areas of Aleppo, Hasakeh, Deir ez-Zor and Raqqa governorates and FAO distributions in the northern governorates - the agricultural belt of the country – have also been reduced in the past few months.

The Syrian Government continues to put in place restrictive administrative hurdles, hampering the effective delivery of aid and have insisted that the United Nations share beneficiary lists. In February, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs instructed the United Nations that all communications with government ministries and public service providers be routed through the MFA.

At a time when needs are growing, and the humanitarian community should be scaling up its response, the Government continues to put in place measures that are not practical and slow down our response.

So far this year the United Nations has requested access to 33 locations for the delivery of aid through inter-agency convoys. Only three have been agreed. To Al Wa'er, Talbiseh and Ar Rastan in Homs. Despite the approval and support of the Governor, Syrian state security forces removed surgical and other medical and reproductive health supplies from the convoys to Al Wa'er and Talbiseh. Urgently needed medical supplies, including surgical items, are scheduled to be delivered to Ar Rastan on 30th March. I ask this Council to make it clear to the Government of Syria that these convoys must be allowed to proceed and their security forces should allow the free passage of all supplies to people in need.

Mr. President,

There has been some confusion about the number of people in besieged and hard to reach locations. In besieged areas people cannot leave and assistance cannot get in on a regular basis.

In February, the United Nations could not deliver any food or medicines to besieged locations. UNRWA has restarted delivery of some assistance to Yarmouk on 4th March. However, food distribution takes place only three times a week, with around 200 families receiving parcels on each distribution day. UNRWA estimates that the 18,000 people trapped in Yarmouk require 400 food parcels daily to meet their basic needs.

An additional 228,000 people are now living under siege in Government-controlled neighborhoods of Deir ez-Zor, by ISIL. They are unable to leave the city and only minimal supplies have been air lifted in by the Government. This increases the total number of people besieged in Syria from 212,000 to an estimated 440,000.

Mr. President,

This situation cannot continue. 185,500 people are in areas besieged by the Government, despite their assertions that they have a responsibility to look after their own people. The rest are in areas besieged by armed groups. The authority of this Council is being undermined. People trapped in besieged locations are becoming more and more desperate. We must be allowed to deliver essential humanitarian items, such as food, nutritional supplies for children, medicines and medical items. Time is running out. More people will die.

The United Nations and its humanitarian partners continue to do everything we can to try to save lives and we are still getting aid to millions of people each month, including through cross border operations. The pledging conference in Kuwait on 31st March is an opportunity to raise some of the resources required to maintain our life saving work. I encourage governments to give generously.

We also need the Council's continued strong support in the following areas:

To remain strong advocates for compliance with international humanitarian and human rights law. Making it clear that parties to the conflict, including the Government, which bears a special responsibility as a Member of the United Nations, cannot act with impunity.

On the issue of denial of access, where parties arbitrarily withhold consent to relief operations there must be consequences and accountability. Council members may wish to consider the concrete steps they would like to take, given the violations of the Council's demands on access contained in resolution 2139.

And on the repeated targeting of health facilities and personnel, the Syrian armed forces, non-state armed groups and terrorist groups must be held accountable for their actions.

Mr. President,

Day after day, month after month, year after year, the death, destruction and violence in Syria grows. As Council members have said many times, there is no humanitarian solution to the crisis. The international community must demonstrate greater determination to reach a long overdue political solution.

Thank you.