

Office for The Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator

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Remarks to the Third International Humanitarian Pledging Conference for Syria

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As Delivered

I join the Secretary-General in thanking His Highness, the Amir of Kuwait for his generosity in agreeing to host this third pledging conference to support the people of Syria and neighbouring countries. I also thank the Government and the people of Kuwait for their continued commitment to the people of Syria. As a result of the leadership of His Highness the Amir, Kuwait continues to play a leading role in humanitarian response efforts across the world and provides a platform for debate and engagement on key humanitarian challenges.

Your Highness, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Last year when we met, we all hoped it would be the last time we would need to come together to raise funds to support humanitarian work in Syria. We hoped that this year, we would be contributing to the rebuilding of Syria and restoring people's livelihoods.

Sadly, we are still a long way from that. Despite the considerable efforts of humanitarian organizations to meet the needs of millions of Syrians requiring assistance, we are constrained by the reality of a war of breathtaking violence and savagery. For example, increased violence in Idlib in the past week has displaced hundreds of thousands more people.

I will focus my comments on the situation inside Syria. Mr. Guterres will talk about the needs of refugees and host communities, and Ms. Clark will look at the impact of this conflict on the development of the region.

When I first visited Syria in 2011, we estimated that one million people were in need of humanitarian aid. Today, that figure stands at 12 million people.

The Syrian economy has collapsed with four out of every five people now living in poverty and destruction of essential infrastructure continues. Before the war, Syria had a modern, state-run water and sewage system. This is no longer the case. 80 per cent of the water infrastructure now needs repair. Average water availability is down by half since the conflict started.

Nearly 5 million people have been trapped for many months without food or medical help in areas that humanitarian agencies cannot reach. More than 400,000 are living in areas where aid cannot get in and they cannot get out. What kind of government besieges its own people, drops barrel bombs and at the same time speaks of its responsibility to protect its own people?

Armed and terrorist organizations think that they can operate outside the framework of international humanitarian and human rights law. We must make them accountable.

We must remember that behind each figure, each statistic, is a child, a woman, a man, a family – terrorized, abused and abandoned.

As we saw in that film, nearly half of all Syrians in need are children. Two million of them are out of school. More and more children are being recruited to fight, and millions of children and adolescents are spending their formative years in the midst of violence, degradation and despair. We are watching the rapid destruction of Syria's future through the trauma of its children. We cannot let that happen.

Women and girls are at grave risk of sexual and gender-based violence, attack, abduction, trafficking, sexual slavery and other abuses.

Nearly half a million Palestine refugees inside Syria are particularly vulnerable and more than half of them have been forced from their homes and have become dependent on the United Nations Works and Relief Agency (UNWRA) for their basic survival.

Your Highness, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

As the war in Syria continues to take a heavy toll in terms of lives lost, courageous humanitarian workers are risking their own lives every day to deliver much-needed aid. Seventy-two humanitarian staff have been killed since 2011, including 42 staff and volunteers from the Syrian Arab Red Crescent. Six hundred health workers have been killed.

Despite this, last year, UN humanitarian organizations inside Syria, including the World Food Program, UNICEF, the World Health Organization, UNHCR and our partners, provided food to over 5 million people a month; enabled millions to get clean water; supplied more than 16.5 million medical treatments, and helped more than 2 million children to go to school.

And we have reached 1.4 million people with food aid through cross-border deliveries under the terms of Security Council resolution 2165.

We did this with your help. I want to thank our donors and I want to thank the first Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, H. E. Sabah Al Khalid Al Hamad Al Sabah, and the Secretary-General's Humanitarian Envoy for Kuwait, Dr. Abdullah Al Matouq, who chaired the Group of Top Donors to the Syria crisis. Our top donors put pressure on each other and ensured that the money pledged was actually received.

We want to build on this success, and we must do that if we are to meet the increased needs we are seeing in Syria and in neighbouring countries.

This year, we need \$8.4 billion for humanitarian aid inside Syria, to support the refugees who have fled, and to support host communities who are under increasing pressure; and to support the health and education sector in the countries so generously hosting millions of refugees. So far we have raised about 8 per cent of what we need.

Your Highness, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is Syrians and host communities who are the first responders and who are bearing the brunt of this humanitarian crisis. After four years, people are exhausted. Their resources are depleted.

The international community has so far failed to find a political solution, and it has failed to prevent the conflict from escalating. We are struggling to continue to protect the most vulnerable and to ensure that everyone has access to the basic necessities of life. The fact that this conflict has gone on for so long and with such devastating consequences is a stain on the world's collective conscience.

I hope that countries will find a way to work together, to chart a route out of this crisis. In the meantime, our focus will continue to be on the people that need our support.

Thank you all very much indeed for your continued generosity. Shukran.