



Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

**Under-Secretary-General Valerie Amos**  
**Remarks to the press**

**Beirut/New York, 6 Sept 2013**

*As delivered*

I've just come from Damascus, where I held talks with members of the government and humanitarian partners about improving our aid operations. I also wanted to give support to UN staff who continue to work in very difficult circumstances. With UNRWA [UN Relief and Works Agency] and the rest of the UN family, there are 4,500 UN staff in Syria working with NGOs and community organizations to get help to the people who need it most, in government- and opposition-controlled areas.

I had positive meetings with the government and hope we will make progress in addressing some of the administrative problems we have faced in getting approval for field operations, convoys and visas for humanitarian aid workers.

Syria and its neighbouring countries are going through a humanitarian crisis on a scale we have rarely seen. The fighting is having a terrible impact on ordinary people; neighbourhoods have been shelled indiscriminately and entire towns have been besieged. Over 100,000 people have been killed; more than four million have been displaced internally. And we have reached the two million mark in terms of people who have fled Syria and are in neighbouring countries as refugees. More than one-third of the people of Syria urgently need humanitarian aid, but the crisis is affecting everyone with the depreciation of the currency and the destruction of essential infrastructure including health facilities. Here in Lebanon and in the other countries surrounding Syria, the refugee crisis is having a very damaging effect on the economy, on the social structure and on host communities.

Inside Syria, protecting civilians is paramount. The rise in the level of sectarian and sexual violence and ongoing human rights abuses are a major concern.

Despite the very difficult and dangerous conditions, humanitarian aid organizations are committed to continuing their work. I was very proud of the commitment shown by the staff of the UN, by the volunteers of the Syrian Arab Red Crescent and the staff of other humanitarian organizations when I had the opportunity to speak with them yesterday.

Thank you.

*For further information, please contact:*  
**OCHA NY: Clare Doyle +1 212 963 5009 (o) +1 646 288 6331 (m) [doylecm@un.org](mailto:doylecm@un.org)**  
**OCHA Beirut: Christina Blunt +961 1 96 25 17 [blunt@un.org](mailto:blunt@un.org)**