

**UNDER-SECRETARY-GENERAL FOR HUMANITARIAN AFFAIRS AND
EMERGENCY RELIEF COORDINATOR, STEPHEN O'BRIEN**

REMARKS AT SYRIA CONFERENCE PLENARY SESSION

London, 4 February 2016

As delivered

Thank you Rouba (Mhaissen); we are listening carefully to you.

Excellencies, colleagues, ladies and gentlemen,

Thank you to the Governments of the United Kingdom, Kuwait, Germany and Norway for co-hosting this important event with the United Nations.

For over five long years, the Syrian people have endured one of the most savage and brutal conflicts of the 21st century. The facts speak for themselves: over 250,000 people killed, well over a million injured, 6.5 million displaced within Syria – in addition to the half a million Palestinian refugees; almost 4.6 million refugees outside Syria, and much of the remaining population – some 13.5 million people – are in dire need of humanitarian assistance.

And amidst this carnage, the warring parties display a complete disregard for international humanitarian and human rights law.

This vicious cycle of death and destruction risks being seen as the new normal in Syria. But death, suffering, wanton destruction and disregard for the law should never be seen as 'normal'.

Every time we think we have reached the nadir of human suffering in this crisis, it continues to sink deeper and deeper before our eyes. The recent pictures of emaciated, starving children in the besieged town of Madaya shocked the collective conscience of the world.

Sadly, the situation in Madaya is only the tip of the iceberg. Over 486,000 people are trapped in besieged areas in Syria. The continued use of siege and starvation as a weapon of war is reprehensible and represents a grave violation of international humanitarian law. It must stop immediately.

And yes, Rouba, one day, the people responsible for these acts will be held to account.

We call on all influential governments here in this room to do more to persuade warring parties to fulfil their basic legal obligations.

Despite the enormous dangers in Syria, the UN and its partners continue to provide life-saving assistance. Each month they deliver food to an average of 6 million people, and in the first ten months of 2015 humanitarians supplied 8.1 million people with clean drinking water; 4.8 million people with tents, blankets and other essentials; 1.9 million people with livelihood support; and 1.5 million children were helped to access school.

I salute the efforts of the thousands of - mostly Syrian - staff and volunteers of the United Nations; the Syrian Arab Red Crescent; the NGOs; the first responders; and the staff of hospitals and clinics throughout the country who carry out their duties day after day, in the face of political pressure and, in some cases, violence and intimidation from the parties to the conflict.

They are true humanitarian heroes. I especially pay tribute to the 82 colleagues who have lost their lives in the line of duty.

These heroes need support from us all – and today is an opportunity for us to demonstrate this in a tangible way.

While donors generously contributed US\$1.25 billion to last year's Syria humanitarian appeal, this amounted to just 43 per cent of the needs. We can do better.

This year we are again launching two separate response plans: the 2016 Syria Humanitarian Response Plan, which calls for nearly \$3.2 billion for humanitarian support inside Syria, and the Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan, which calls for US\$4.5 billion for humanitarian response, resilience and stabilization in neighbouring countries.

We are laying particular stress on building Syrians' resilience by supporting men and women to regain their livelihoods and by getting children back into school. This is their only means of rekindling hope for the future.

Putting Syrian people at the centre and these plans into practice, we must today commit to raising this significant new funding and back up those commitments with prompt disbursements.

Let us show the people of Syria we are their partners. We have not forgotten them, and let us give them hope for the future by taking the unprecedented step of meeting 100 per cent of this year's appeal.

Please act now. Thank you.