EMERGENCY RELIEF COORDINATOR AND UNDER-SECRETARY-GENERAL FOR HUMANITARIAN AFFAIRS, VALERIE AMOS
STATEMENT ON SYRIA

(New York, 31 January 2014): I am deeply frustrated and disappointed that the Geneva II talks concluded today without agreement on humanitarian pauses to bring relief to hundreds of thousands of people blockaded in towns and cities in Syria.

More than three million people in Syria are trapped in areas where heavy fighting continues or that are besieged by Government or Opposition forces. I am extremely concerned that, while the discussions continue to try and find a political solution to end the crisis, ordinary men, women and children are dying needlessly across the country and others are desperate for want of food, clean water or medical care.

In Hassakeh, in the isolated northwest, we have been trying to secure the agreement of the Syrian Government to bring humanitarian aid through the Al Yarubiah border point. We have the agreement from the Iraqi authorities, but have yet to get agreement from the Syrian authorities. The UN team that visited the Governorate last week report that people are running out of food. In Eastern Ghouta, we have written guarantees from opposition groups that they would let aid in but we have not made progress. People need urgent medical attention, but are unable to leave and cannot find the medicines they need. In Darayya, children have been out of school for months. Their parents have no jobs and fear for their families’ lives because the violence continues day in, day out.

The situation is totally unacceptable. The international community has clearly called for immediate action to facilitate safe and unhindered delivery of assistance across the country. So far this has not translated into significant progress or action on the ground.

This week we have seen small pockets of progress: enough food to feed about 5,000 out of the 20,000 people stranded in Yarmouk camp. A temporary ceasefire agreed in Barzeh, which will help humanitarian organizations to get aid to 1,000 families. An aid convoy reached Aleppo with supplies for 15,000 people. Representatives of both sides continue to work out how to get aid into Homs Old City and evacuate women, children and the elderly. This must happen immediately.

We need urgent action now. Sieges must be lifted. Ceasefire agreements must be agreed and convoys allowed to proceed immediately and safely. Border crossings and roads need to be opened to allow the regular flow of vital aid supplies. Those who fail to protect civilians or facilitate assistance are violating International Humanitarian law.

As the parties to this brutal conflict continue to try to find a way to end the crisis, the humanitarian plight of ordinary Syrian men, women and children must be their number one priority.

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