

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

**STATEMENT ON DARAYYA AND THE SITUATION IN OTHER BESIEGED
AREAS IN SYRIA**

I remain extremely concerned about the evacuation of the entire population of the besieged town of Darayya, on 26 and 27 August following an agreement between representatives of Darayya and the Syrian Government. The UN was not a party to this agreement, and was not informed of the evacuation until a few hours before it took place. This evacuation followed four years of unrelenting siege during which children starved, people resorted to eating grass and the town was subjected to an onslaught of fighting, including aerial bombardment, and severe restrictions on freedom of movement for civilians, as well as on commercial and humanitarian goods.

The United Nations works on the ground at the request of both the Government of Syria and the people of Darayya to address humanitarian and protection needs of all those affected by the evacuation, however agreements resulting in a mass evacuation of civilians after a prolonged period of besiegement do not comply with international humanitarian law and human rights law. Let us be clear, all sieges, a medieval tactic, must be lifted. This should not be through any type of agreement which results in the forced displacement of the civilian population. What happened in Darayya should not be precedent setting for other besieged areas in Syria. It is imperative that all those displaced are allowed to return voluntarily, in safety and in dignity, to their homes as soon as the situation allows it.

I am also gravely concerned about the deteriorating situation in other besieged areas in Syria where people have little physical protection and limited access to basic life-saving assistance, including the neighborhood of Al Waer in Homs city. Despite the reports of a current pause in fighting, the estimated 75,000 people in Al Waer have been subjected to an increase in indiscriminate and aerial attacks over the past week causing the death and injury of many civilians, including children, the reported destruction of homes and first responder stations, as well as increased restrictions on freedom of movement.

The people of Syria have suffered long enough, the civilian population, the most vulnerable, children, women, disabled and the elderly are the ones caught in the middle of fighting. I once again call on all parties for the immediate lifting of sieges of civilians in Syria, including Madaya, Deir-Ez-Zor city, Douma, Foah and Kefraya and other besieged locations, for an end to indiscriminate attacks on civilian-populated areas and civilian infrastructure and to take all necessary measures to ensure protection for all civilians as required under international humanitarian and human rights law.

New York, 30 August 2016