



Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

مكتب تنسيق الشؤون الإنسانية (أوتشا)

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**STATEMENT TO THE PRESS ON SYRIA
DAMASCUS, 14 DECEMBER 2015**

As delivered

Good morning everyone.

I have just concluded a three-day visit to Syria. This was my second mission to the country since I assumed the position of UN Humanitarian Chief. I came to Syria to find ways to improve the ongoing response efforts and to ensure that those in need across the country will receive the assistance they so desperately require.

The United Nations and our partners have just finalized the Humanitarian Response Plan for 2016: we need US\$3.2 billion dollars to help the 13.5 million Syrians who require some form of assistance. Some 6.5 million of them are internally displaced; 72% of the population have no access to drinking water; and 2 million children are out of school. This situation is unacceptable. A blot on our collective conscience.

During my trip I was able to visit Homs City where I crossed conflict lines to visit communities in the Al Waer neighbourhood where the parties recently agreed a cessation of hostilities. This agreement has allowed the UN and our partners, chiefly the Syrian Arab Red Crescent, to deliver during my visit, life-saving assistance to communities who have not received aid since January 2015.

While I was pleased that we were able to access Al Waer, people in many other similar places across Syria continue to be deprived of assistance and suffer from the consequences of this brutal crisis. We need sustained humanitarian access to all people in need, with or without local agreements. Humanitarian access should not be conditional on the existence of such agreement.

4.5 million people continue to live in areas that are hard to reach for the humanitarian community. Almost 400,000 of those are besieged. Between January and November, the UN and

partners were only able to reach 1.5 % people in need in besieged areas and 7% of the people in need in hard to reach areas. Allowing access to humanitarian supplies is the obligation of all those who are party to the conflict.

In Al Waer, I visited a children's hospital that was badly damaged, and in which patients of all ages are now treated. I was able to talk to patients who had been injured and witnessed first-hand the resilience of the Syrian people.

I also visited a former school that is now used by 45 displaced families as shelter. The school had been hit by mortars several times and some of the children severely injured during the attacks.

In my discussions with the people of Al Waer, they all expressed their strong wish to stay in Al Waer, and hoped that the agreement would allow people to return to their homes.

I had constructive meetings with the Governor of Homs, H.E. Talal Barazi, and local community leaders. We discussed ways to build on the agreement on cessation of hostilities in order to enable us to reach more people in need, regardless of where they are. I emphasized the importance of implementing the next phases of the reconciliation agreement.

The situation remains fragile and even during my visit a car bomb exploded near the al-Zahra area in Homs City, a devastating attack that was claimed by ISIL, killing and injuring many innocent people.

I am deeply saddened by the aerial attacks that reportedly hit a school in Douma, Eastern Ghouta yesterday. A child was also killed and others injured in a mortar attack in the Ain Karsh area of Damascus city. This is a tragic reminder of the urgency of finding a political solution and securing a nation-wide cease-fire. Such indiscriminate attacks are unacceptable and we must do our utmost to protect innocent citizens, including women and children, against such atrocities. I continue to call on all parties to respect international humanitarian and human rights laws.

I also met with senior Government officials in Damascus, including the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Foreign Affairs H.E. Waleed Al Mouallem; Deputy Prime Minister, Local Administration Minister Omar Ghalawanji, and Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, Dr. Faisal Mikdad. We had constructive discussions, which I hope will translate into concrete improvements on the ground, especially in our efforts to help people in hard-to-reach and besieged areas.

I also met with the President of the Syrian Arab Red Crescent, Dr. Abdul Rahman Al Attar. I salute the huge efforts and courage of SARC and their volunteers in delivering life-saving aid and persevering in the challenging and often dangerous circumstances in which we all operate. They are a valued partner in humanitarian operations in Syria.

Despite the challenges on the ground the humanitarian community continues to reach millions of people in Syria every month. However, much more is needed.

We desperately need additional funds in order to continue our efforts and I hope that the international community will pledge generously at the London Syria Conference on 4 February 2016.

Syrians need our support more than ever and we must not let them down.

Thank you.