

UNDER-SECRETARY-GENERAL STEPHEN O'BRIEN
OPENING REMARKS TO THE FIFTH SYRIA TOP DONOR GROUP MEETING

Kuwait City, 1 September 2015

As prepared for delivery

Your Excellencies,
Ministers,
Colleagues,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Welcome to this fifth meeting of the Syria Top Donors Group.

I start with my sincere and countless thanks to His Highness the Amir and the Government and people of Kuwait for their exemplary and steadfast generosity; their continuing proactive, positive, principled engagement; their willingness to host the International High-Level Humanitarian Pledging Conference for Syria; and their support in hosting these Top Donors Group meetings.

Thank you in particular to Dr. Al-Matouq for your leadership and determined efforts to promote the humanitarian agenda with the states of the Gulf region, and for your support in mobilizing resources for the Syria response.

Thank you to all of the members of the Top Donors Group for your strong advocacy on behalf of the humanitarian community that is working to respond to the humanitarian and resilience needs of people affected by the conflict in Syria.

Last year, an impressive 90 percent of pledges to the Syria crisis turned into commitments. That is a direct result of your persistent advocacy efforts. So far Australia, Austria, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Finland, Germany, Japan, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Slovakia, Slovenia, the United Kingdom and Kuwait have all committed their pledges for 2015.

I would like to take this opportunity to welcome the Government of Switzerland to the Group. We all value your engagement and commitment.

Ladies and gentlemen,

As the Syria crisis enters its fifth year, humanitarian needs are greater than ever. The conflict has forced 7.6 million people into displacement in Syria while more than four million people have taken shelter in neighbouring countries.

One million people have been displaced by violence this year alone, many for the second or third time, and the humanitarian crisis only looks set to worsen if a political solution is not found.

This year – and thanks to your generous contributions - humanitarian agencies have delivered food aid, shelter, cash and vouchers, medical services, clean water supplies, psycho-social support and schooling to millions of people in Syria and in neighbouring countries. International and Syrian NGOs are a cornerstone of this response.

UN agencies were able to significantly scale up cross-border operations under Security Council resolution 2165 and 2191. A huge thanks to all of you whose generous support has backed this work. In the first half of 2015, food was delivered to 5.9 million people per month and medical treatments and supplies were provided to nine million people. In the circumstances, these are truly outstanding results - life-saving and protection – on which we can and must build with confidence and significantly scale up to match the escalating needs.

But as open conflict continues to spur an ever-deepening humanitarian and protection crisis in Syria, humanitarian needs continue to vastly outpace the response.

This is partly due to the insecurity that is still seriously impeding aid agencies from accessing everyone in need.

Operating in Syria is difficult and dangerous: 79 humanitarian aid workers have been killed since March 2011. But despite the dangers, humanitarian agencies continue to stay and deliver to millions of people in need.

A second reason for the gap between needs and response is the funding shortfall. Aid agencies have received just one third of the funding needed for the Syria Response Plan and the Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan. For 2015, the combined plans call for US\$7.42 billion, of which only \$2.38 billion has been received.

I know that a significant amount - estimated at \$500 million - has been channeled outside these plans. We welcome every contribution that goes to Syrians in need. However, I encourage everyone to allocate funding in line with our comprehensive strategy and make sure that all funding is reflected in OCHA's Financial Tracking Service so that programming and financing is as transparent as possible and we can avoid duplications.

But despite the generosity of our donors, the message is clear: Needs are growing and aid agencies are forced to scale back.

We urgently need donors to convert outstanding pledges into firm commitments.

Funding shortfalls in Syria can be the difference between life and death. Under-funding could have disastrous results on the civilian population both inside Syria and on Syrians who have crossed borders into neighbouring countries.

Public services in Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq and Turkey, which between them are hosting millions of refugees from Syria, are straining at the seams.

Without new funding, the World Food Programme has already scaled back food aid by one fifth, and food vouchers by as much as half for some displaced communities, and will have to further reduce its food aid and cash assistance.

UNICEF will not have the \$185 million it needs to build, supply or staff new schools. This could jeopardize the education of 1.6 million children inside Syria.

The funding gap will continue to deny 225,000 people access to life-saving health care inside Syria.

And unless donors come forward, the timely procurement of vital shelter supplies or clothes that Syrians will need to survive the winter months will not be possible.

Providing these life-saving services is essential to a dignified life for everyone affected by this conflict, in Syria and beyond. But the only thing that will make a lasting difference is that the fighting stops. That there is a political solution.

As the war enters its fifth year, we must look forward and do more to support people as they try to rebuild their destroyed livelihoods. This is the only way we can really help people to regain their independence and support their families once again.

Given the volatility of the situation in Syria, responding to the overlapping and ever-shifting needs requires flexible funding mechanisms.

As part of the Whole of Syria approach, humanitarian teams in Syria and across the region are working together to assess the evolving needs. The results of these efforts will be reflected in the upcoming Humanitarian Needs Overview. I would like to encourage humanitarian organizations and governments from the Gulf to actively participate and contribute to the humanitarian needs exercises.

I thank all the Gulf humanitarian actors, especially the State of Kuwait, for supporting the multilateral humanitarian system and reaching out to millions of people in need.

The consequences of the Syrian conflict will be felt many years after the fighting comes to an end - not only across the region, but also more widely as people flee Syria in search of safety and better opportunities. We are witnessing this in the growing migration crisis that is playing out on the shores of Europe, with the number of migrants and asylum-

seekers at record highs. This growing crisis puts all the more onus on the need to find a political solution to the Syria conflict.

Over coming months and over the course of next year, we will continue to call for your vigorous and sustained support. We will continue to ask donors to come forward and meet their commitments, as well as to leverage additional funding for the world's largest humanitarian crisis. Only by working together can we mobilize the support Syrians so desperately need.

I once again warmly thank Kuwait for hosting this meeting and salute their commitment to our common humanity. As I said yesterday to His Highness the Crown Prince, humanitarian action is in the Kuwaiti DNA as evidenced by H.E. the Under-Secretary of Foreign Affairs' enthusiastic and encouraging commitment about the world Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul next year in May.

I also thank you all for taking the time today to participate. I look forward to a fruitful discussion.