

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

Opening remarks at the ‘Humanitarian situation inside Syria: Needs, challenges and way forward’ thematic session of the Brussels conference on Supporting the Future of Syria and the Region

Brussels, 4 April 2017

As delivered

Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Thank you for this opportunity to speak about the humanitarian needs, challenges and way forward in the Syria response. I look forward to an interactive discussion on what more we can all do to keep saving lives, protecting civilians and supporting their resilience in what remains undoubtedly one of the largest humanitarian and protection crises in the world.

And just because we have entered the seventh year, it does not mean that familiarity should breed acceptance or inevitability. It remains outrageous, a stain on the world, unacceptable and urgent.

The immense needs and operational challenges inside Syria have been well-documented as we enter the seventh year of this horrific conflict. Although we as humanitarians cannot stop the ongoing indiscriminate attacks, medieval barbaric sieges and forced displacements, we have been providing a lifeline to millions of those in need, including through regular programmes, cross-line, cross-border and air operations. And by we, I mean the whole humanitarian family. Virtually every possible means of accessing people, particularly those in hard-to-reach and besieged areas, is being exploited, thanks to the heroic efforts of Syrian first-responders and non-government organizations at the forefront as well as the broader international humanitarian community. We continue to demand safe, rapid, sustained and unimpeded access to all those in need, and we must never relent in that demand. This is about reaching people in need regardless of the line of control and via the most direct routes to secure the highest impact.

Any number of priorities can be flagged in terms of the way forward, but I will just highlight a few to help kick off the discussion. Ensuring accountability, establishing the truth and providing reparations must be on our horizon if the people of Syria are ever to find reconciliation and peace. Women and girls have been disproportionately and differentially impacted by the Syrian conflict, as they remain at higher risk of gender-

based violence, particularly domestic violence, sexual violence and exploitation, child marriage and human trafficking but also let's not forget, it is so often left unsaid, the rape and recruitment of boys. As part of the No Lost Generation framework, we must repeat tirelessly our commitment to provide every child in Syria with the opportunity to access quality education and protection, and for youth and adolescents to meaningfully participate in decision-making that impacts their future.

We need to ensure that food insecurity across Syria is kept in check and that effective food assistance can be provided in a way to eventually transition those in need from dependency to self-sufficiency. After this full six years of war, the country is sprayed and littered with explosive hazards, such as landmines, improvised explosive devices and explosive remnants of war which not only endanger the lives and livelihoods of civilians and impede humanitarian access, but they also hinder socio-economic recovery and eventual reconstruction – making humanitarian mine action a key protection concern.

And as the country faces the loss of almost two-thirds of its GDP since the onset of the conflict, over half its population has been displaced whether internally and abroad, and with a poverty rate of over 85 per cent and rising, the need for an appropriate response anchored in resilience cannot be understated.

As part of the international humanitarian community's actions and deep commitment to support all those on the front-lines of the response, the UN-coordinated Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP), launched earlier this month, appeals for \$3.4 billion and sets out how partners within the whole of Syria framework intend to assist at least 13 million people, including vulnerable Palestine refugees, across Syria. The comprehensive activities comprising the HRP span the humanitarian-development nexus and provide a bridge towards longer-term recovery even as the most critical life-saving and protection needs are being addressed. I pay tribute to all those who were involved in both the data and negotiations of the HRP. This already prioritized, intensely detailed, and well thought through plan should be promptly and fully supported to enable principled humanitarian action to stem the misery of this unparalleled crisis.

Multilateral action together does create the greater impact for affected people who are suffering and need our relief action, converting huge cash to an effective, immediate, coordinated, collective, collaborative programme to save lives, keep those lives going and to help build a practical and hopeful future. Always know that it is peace that is the best antidote to suffering.

As has been said innumerable times, we must recognize that humanitarian action remains a lifeline not a solution to this conflict. The warring parties and those with influence over them must abide by their responsibilities and enable access under international humanitarian law. The protection of civilians, including of Syrian aid workers, remains paramount. In the face of unimaginable horrors and heartbreak unfolding across Syria over the past few years, as humanitarians we have moved beyond sounding the alarm to holding to account all those who stand between us and those in need. For as long as the conflict ensues, we must be ready and resourced to respond, protect and deliver for the

people of Syria. We continue to have our chance to show solidarity with the people who suffer, who we can help and indeed we must help independently, impartially, neutrally, politically unconditionally to relieve them with life-saving and protection, wherever, however, whoever, whenever, any and each person who has suffered and each and everyone of us would dread to be in this situation.
