

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

STATEMENT ON THE SITUATION IN ALEPPO, SYRIA

29 November 2016

I am extremely concerned about the fate of civilians as a result of the deeply alarming and chilling situation unfolding in Aleppo city.

Intensified ground fighting and indiscriminate aerial bombardment over the past few days in eastern Aleppo city has reportedly killed and injured scores of civilians. There are no functioning hospitals left, and official food stocks are practically finished in eastern Aleppo. At the same time, indiscriminate shelling continues on civilian-populated areas and civilian infrastructure in western Aleppo, killing and injuring civilians, and displacing over 20,000 people in recent weeks. Civilian infrastructure continues to be purposefully destroyed across Aleppo.

The intensity of attacks on eastern Aleppo neighbourhoods over the past few days has forced thousands of civilians to flee to other parts of the city. Initial reports indicate that up to 16,000 people have been displaced, many into uncertain and precarious situations. It is likely that thousands more will have no choice but to flee should fighting continue to spread and intensify over the coming days.

The Syrian Arab Red Crescent (SARC) and local NGO partners have initiated a response to those displaced. The UN is also present on the ground with prepositioned supplies to complement the on-going response and ready to provide immediate assistance and medical evacuations for civilians inside eastern Aleppo.

The parties to the conflict in Syria have shown time and again that they are willing to take any action to secure military advantage even if it means killing, maiming or starving civilians into submission in the process. While the world is watching events in Aleppo, another 700,000 people are in other besieged areas across the country, mostly in Rural Damascus surrounded by Government forces. In these areas – as in eastern Aleppo – there is no protection and little access to life-saving items. People in these besieged areas are trapped, terrified and running out of time.

I ask all parties to the conflict to restore basic humanity in Syria. I call on them to lift sieges, ensure that they do not target civilians and civilian infrastructure, and that they allow humanitarian organizations safe and unimpeded access to bring life-saving help to those displaced or under siege. I remind the parties that any evacuation of civilians must be safe, voluntary and in accordance with international humanitarian law and human rights law. It is also 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.

The people of Syria have suffered far too much and for far too long. More than anything, I hope a path towards a political solution can be found soon so that we can give some semblance of hope to the many millions of Syrian families who tonight are hungry, sick, and fearing for their lives.