



Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

**UNDER-SECRETARY-GENERAL FOR HUMANITARIAN AFFAIRS AND  
EMERGENCY RELIEF COORDINATOR, VALERIE AMOS**

**Statement to the Security Council on Syria**  
**New York, 28 May 2015**

*As delivered*

Madam President,

As this is my last briefing to the Council, it is in many ways fitting that it is on Syria as during my time as Emergency Relief Coordinator it is the crisis that has taken more of my time and attention, and that of this Council, than any other crisis in the world. It is the Syria crisis and its consequences which have led me to the belief that this Council and the international community more broadly, needs to do more to protect civilians and ensure greater accountability for violations of international humanitarian law.

I have been proud to serve in the United Nations as I have a strong belief in the values of the UN and the principles underpinning the charter and feel that in today's unpredictable and deeply troubled world, that we need the United Nations more than ever. As I have watched the huge rise in the number of people around the world affected by conflict and natural disasters, an estimated 70 million in 2010, when I started, and 114 million today, it is clear that there needs to be a major rethink of humanitarian response efforts: who does what, who pays for it and greater investment in conflict prevention, disaster preparedness, peace and state building.

In my time in this role I have seen the very worst of what people are capable of and also the very best of humanity.

The countless Syrians who, despite the gravity of their situation have not given up hope and refuse to buy into the rhetoric that the country's problems can be solved through violence. It is found in the bonds forged between strangers who do everything they can to help their fellow countrymen and women survive. It is reflected in the generosity of families in Syria and neighbouring countries sheltering, feeding, and clothing the displaced, without asking anything in return.

It is embodied in the staff and volunteers of the Syrian Arab Red Crescent; of the NGOs; of the first responders; the staff of hospitals and clinics throughout the country who do not let narrow political interest cloud their commitment to doing everything they can to safeguard the well-being of ordinary Syrians.

And it is demonstrated in the thousands of staff of the United Nations on the ground who carry out their duties day in and day out, despite petty political pressure and, in some cases, violence and intimidation from the parties to the conflict.

For more than four years we have watched Syria descend into deeper depths of despair, surpassing what even the most pessimistic observers thought possible. The situation throughout the country is, by any measure, extremely grave and deteriorating by the day.

In the past weeks we have seen more and more heinous acts. Innocent men, women and children killed; maimed; displaced; and subjected to a savagery that no human should have to endure.

For example at the end of April, a market in Darkoush, rural Idlib, was subjected to aerial bombing killing between 40 and 50 people and wounding over 100 civilians. The same market was again hit last week, with reports of twenty more people killed. Reports have emerged of ISIL's killing of civilians following its capture of Palmyra in the past week. Such blatant disregard for the most basic rules of international humanitarian law – the distinction between civilians and combatants – must be condemned in the strongest terms.

In February of last year, the Council came together to adopt resolution 2139. It was clear in what it demanded of the parties: end the violence; comply with international law; and ensure that obligations to facilitate humanitarian access to people in need were met.

Yet, for the past fifteen months, the Secretary-General has systematically reported on the continued non-compliance with the Council's demands. While the cross-border deliveries enabled by resolutions 2165 and 2191 have allowed the United Nations to extend its reach and complement the enormous efforts of our NGO partners, the parties to the conflict have ignored practically all aspects of the resolution.

The use of chlorine continues to be reported, killing, injuring and terrorizing civilians.

Indiscriminate attacks, although prohibited in International Humanitarian Law, continue with no regard for the protection of civilians.

Schools and hospitals continue to be attacked. Physicians for Human Rights recorded more attacks on medical facilities in April this year than it had in any month since the adoption of resolution 2139.

422,000 people - nearly twice the number as when resolution 2139 was adopted - are under siege. If I had reported this at the beginning of the conflict I am sure that Council members would not have believed it possible: today we take it for granted. The UN and our partners were not able to reach any besieged locations in April.

People are trying to survive, day by day, without the basic necessities of life such as water and electricity. And parties to the conflict continue to cut services, collectively punishing entire villages and cities in the process.

Restrictions on the delivery of aid continue. The Government's introduction of new rules and regulations which result in delays and distractions, are preventing us from delivering assistance, including surgical supplies, to people in desperate need. Of the 48 inter-agency convoys requests submitted since December, five have been completed; nine have been approved in principle by the Government of Syria and are at various stages of preparations, and a further eleven have been put on hold due to insecurity. Nineteen more are awaiting a reply.

ISIL's advance brings with it new depths of depravity to Syria with indiscriminate killing and maiming, raping and destroying. They have forcibly recruited children and made the delivery of humanitarian assistance more and more difficult in areas under their control. In addition to restricting operations delivering food and other supplies, aid workers have been prevented from vaccinating children in areas of the country under their control.

Today, more than 12.2 million people are in urgent need of humanitarian assistance in Syria - an increase of almost a third compared to when resolution 2139 was adopted. Many of those who were previously able to care for themselves are now in need of help. Less than half of the country's hospitals are fully functioning. Two million children in Syria are out of school. The social, economic and human costs of this tragedy are profound. It may take generations for Syria to recover.

An additional 540,000 people have been displaced this year alone adding to the 7.6 million already displaced.

Another nearly four million people have sought refuge in neighbouring countries, placing host countries and communities under unbearable pressure. My thanks to Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey for their significant efforts in this regard. Desperation means that more and more people are prepared to make the perilous journey to Europe by sea.

The Security Council can demonstrate its leadership and uphold its responsibility for international peace and security by taking the following measures:

1. Ensuring the protection of civilians;
2. Ensuring that the parties to the conflict abide by their international legal obligations - and Security Council resolutions - to facilitate humanitarian access to all people in need throughout the country, without discrimination;
3. Bringing an end to the sieges, which collectively punish people;
4. Considering all possible avenues to ensure accountability, sending a clear message to those responsible for violations of international law, as well as their victims, that the international community will not tolerate such action in Syria or elsewhere;
5. Stepping up financial support to the humanitarian response effort;
6. Respecting the non-political nature of humanitarian aid and giving aid workers the space they need to carry out their work free of political pressure.

I know that there are no easy answers or quick fixes. But I also know that we cannot let the difficult prevent us from upholding our responsibility to act on behalf of the people of Syria. We cannot leave Syrians abandoned to hopelessness and further despair.

The Security Council is entrusted with considerable power and responsibility. For the sake of Syria and its future generations, this Council must set aside its political differences and come together to find a solution to what appear to be intractable problems. We saw in the passing of resolutions 2139 and 2165 what can be done when this Council acts together and speaks with one voice. I very much hope it happens again.

Thank you.