

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

SECURITY COUNCIL BRIEFING ON HUMANITARIAN ACCESS IN SYRIA

STATEMENT TO THE PRESS

3 June 2016

I have just briefed the Security Council on the humanitarian situation in Syria and in particular on critical access issues.

People across Syria continue to face horrific deprivation and violence, especially those trapped in besieged areas.

I remain extremely concerned for the welfare of people trapped in the towns of Mare'a and Sheikh Issa as ISIL forces advance; for the people in eastern Aleppo; and am appalled at the mortar attack on the Mseifra IDP camp in Dar'aa Governorate last weekend.

I told the Council that the operating space for humanitarian actors is shrinking as violence and attacks across Syria increase; and that recent attacks are creating new humanitarian emergencies and compounding the challenges in existing emergency areas.

I warned Members of the Council that attacks on medical facilities and health personnel have continued in the last days, despite the recent resolution passed by the Security Council, and despite the expressions of concern and commitments to action.

This is unacceptable.

I reminded the Council that needs are the most acute in besieged locations. It is there that the parties to the conflict actively breach the basic laws of war. While humanitarians press for access, there remain areas where access continues to be denied.

Besiegement is not a natural or necessary consequence of conflict, it is a deliberate policy of parties, and one which can be undone if the political will to do so can be mustered. While we work for more access, we have to keep in mind the only sustainable solution: a complete lifting of all sieges.

Despite the escalating challenges to humanitarian operations, we are reaching millions of Syrians in

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need through regular and cross-border assistance each month. I was able to report that just today a UN inter-agency convoy completed a delivery of desperately needed food for 45,000 civilians in Moadamiyeh.

We are slowly accessing more and more people – since January over 820,000 have had assistance, many of them more than once – but the progress, while encouraging, is far from enough.

During the month of May, we reached only two locations by land - East Harasta and Yarmouk - representing 20,000 people. This is only 3.4 per cent of the total besieged population of 592,700. While we continued to reach those in Deir ez Zour through high-altitude airdrops, the one-off and inconsistent land access throughout May was simply not enough.

It is critical however, that we have been able to reach 40 per cent of people in 14 of the 19 besieged locations, because it has meant that we have been able to connect with people who have been isolated for too long. As well as delivering vital supplies we have been able to assess their needs and monitor the impact of our response.

When aid workers entered Darayya on Wednesday, for the first time in four years, they encountered a truly dismal situation. People have acute medical needs and clearly do not have enough food.

As you know, the focus of the Council's discussion today was on the question of air bridges and air drops to be used for areas denied humanitarian access, as requested by the ISSG last month.

Our position remains firm and clear:

We need to see full approval of the June plan for humanitarian access.

We need the consent of the Syrian government and all necessary security guarantees, in order to conduct airdrops.

We need all parties to allow freedom of movement for civilians and humanitarian access.

Above all, we need the fighting to stop and a political solution to start.

As humanitarians, we can deliver humanitarian action - we can't fix the politics or the root causes.

We need the firm action and political resolve of the international community to break the impasse and ensure that people get the life-saving aid and protection they need so desperately and to which they are entitled to.

As we enter the holy month of Ramadan, I urged all parties to the conflict to not just reflect on Islam's core values of charity, mercy and peace, but to use this moment to apply these values to improve the situation of those innocent civilians who suffer so terribly in this conflict.