

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

STATEMENT TO THE SECURITY COUNCIL ON SYRIA

New York, 26 June 2014

As delivered

Mr. President,

This is the fourth briefing to the Council since the adoption of resolution 2139 on humanitarian access issues in Syria. The resolution demanded action by parties to the conflict in a number of areas including ceasing attacks against civilians and doing everything in their power to facilitate rapid, safe and unhindered humanitarian access to people in need of assistance.

With its adoption, we all had hoped for a significant improvement in the situation on the ground. However, I again regret to inform the Council that violence and attacks on civilians by all parties to the conflict and human rights abuses continue unabated, with devastating consequences for those affected.

There have been numerous examples of targeted or indiscriminate attacks on civilians in densely populated areas, in violation of the most fundamental principles of international humanitarian law. The failure to respect and protect the lives of civilians was for example apparent on the morning of 18th of June when barrel bombs were dropped on a camp for displaced people in As Shajara in southern Syria, near the border with Jordan. Around 350 families lived in the camp. Dozens of people, including women and children were killed.

Countless others have lost their lives or been injured as the conflict continues to rage in other parts of country, including in the Governorates of Aleppo, Hama, Idleb, Dar'a, Rural Damascus and Deir-ez-Zor. This morning in Aleppo, at least 17 civilians were reportedly killed and more than 30 injured by barrel bombs dropped near Halawaniyeh square. Also this morning, at least 15 civilians were killed by aerial strikes targeting numerous neighborhoods in Ar-Raqqa, including an educational facility and a library. On 7 June, ten people were killed and 55 others were injured as a car bomb went off in Homs city.

241,000 people continue to live under siege conditions unable to leave their communities and we are unable to get in to deliver much needed humanitarian assistance. Since my last briefing to the Council only 2,467 people or 1 per cent of those living in besieged areas have received much needed food assistance.

Mr. President,

This level of obstruction is inhuman and goes against the basic commitment to human dignity and rights UN Member States agreed to in Chapter 1, Article 3 of the UN Charter, and I quote:

“The purposes of the United Nations are... to achieve international cooperation in solving international problems of an economic, social, cultural or humanitarian character, and in promoting and encouraging respect for human rights and for fundamental freedoms for all.”

(UN Charter, Chapter 1, Article 3, June 1945).

Mr. President,

On 21 June, a truce in Yarmouk was agreed between the parties. The agreement foresees the surrender of weapons by non-state armed groups, the withdrawal of foreign fighters, the return of Palestinian refugees, the restoration of basic services and the provision of humanitarian assistance. UNRWA was not part of the truce agreement, and has not been assigned a monitoring role. UNRWA is seeking support from all parties to ensure it is granted unhindered access as it has been unable to enter the camp to deliver assistance since early June.

In recent weeks, attacks on civilian infrastructure by armed opposition groups have increased, resulting in significant damage or disruption to water, sewage or electricity networks in the cities of Aleppo, Idleb and Deir-ez-Zor. In Aleppo city, as many as 1 million people remain without safe drinking water after one such attack. In Deir-ez-Zor, ongoing fighting with the deliberate denial of access into the Governorate by various opposition groups, has made it increasingly difficult for humanitarian organisations to bring life-saving relief supplies to the area. Over the course of the past two weeks, more than 40,000 people have been displaced to eastern Deir-ez-Zor city.

Mr. President,

Once again I remind this Council that targeting or indiscriminately attacking vulnerable civilians constitutes a war crime. There can be no justification for such action. Deliberately obstructing humanitarian access and depriving civilians of access to services essential to their survival, is unlawful and inhumane.

Mr. President,

In 2011 I told this Council that one million people in Syria needed humanitarian assistance. That figure now stands at 10.8 million.

1.5 million more than there were just six months ago.

The number of people in need in hard-to-reach areas now stands at 4.7 million.

An increase of 1.2 million since resolution 2139 was adopted in February.

UN agencies and NGO partners continue their efforts to meet urgent humanitarian needs. Staff have deployed to difficult and dangerous locations to engage in negotiations to secure access and to deliver much needed aid. Many have been killed, injured, detained or taken hostage. Nearly 60 aid workers have lost their lives in the course of their work so far. Countless hours have been spent negotiating and facilitating convoy movements in compliance with complicated and onerous administrative procedures. Despite all these efforts, four years into this war, we are unable to sustainably reach nearly half of those identified as being in the direst need.

Insecurity and active conflict play a role in preventing humanitarian access to many locations. However arbitrary restrictions and obstructions, including bureaucratic procedures imposed by the Government limit or obstruct where we deliver aid, to whom and how often. Some opposition groups have also attacked, threatened and refused to cooperate with humanitarian workers.

In April the Government of Syria introduced new truck sealing procedures intended to streamline and ensure safe passage of regular aid deliveries. This new mechanism was poorly implemented and resulted in a large backlog of deliveries. Food assistance fell by nearly a million in May and has yet to be restored to previous levels, with only 50 per cent of planned food assistance dispatched in June. On 9th of June, the Government announced additional requirements involving the submission of monthly distribution plans and weekly loading plans.

In addition, the Government introduced new procedures for the delivery of assistance to hard-to-reach locations through UN hubs. The new procedures require three levels of approval, undermine previous agreements and have caused two successive months of decline in aid deliveries. I cannot describe to the Council the frustration felt by experienced aid workers who have to spend endless hours trying to get agreement for aid deliveries as people's lives hang in the balance. The focus of the Government of Syria remains on controlling the work of the UN and its partners. Our focus remains on the people who so desperately need our help.

Mr. President,

Despite repeated calls for the free passage of all medicines and surgical equipment in aid convoys, certain items continue to be excluded or removed depriving tens of thousands of people each month of their basic right to life-saving medical assistance. The Government continues to prohibit the inclusion of medical supplies in shipments intended for opposition-held areas. This deliberate denial of essential medicine and medical equipment undermines the very basis of humanitarian action.

The ability of international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to operate in Syria also remains severely constrained due to bureaucratic and operational constraints. A proposed amendment to the existing Memorandum of Understanding regulating the work of NGOs and aimed at reducing restrictions, was submitted to the Syrian Government on

26th of February. It remains unanswered. Effective humanitarian assistance cannot be delivered without NGOs, who remain an essential partner in the aid effort.

Mr. President,

The UN and its partners remain committed and prepared to scale up operations and provide life-saving assistance to men, women and children in need throughout the country, despite the challenging and dangerous operational environment on the ground. Nearly 3.3 million people received food assistance from the World Food Programme and partners in May; more than 16 million people were assisted with clean drinking water through the provision of chlorination tablets by UNICEF and partners; around 2.9 million children were vaccinated against polio in the latest round; 2.3 million people received critically needed non-food items from UNHCR and its partners; and 4 million people received medical assistance by WHO and partners in the first five months of 2014.

However needs continue to grow and are outpacing our response efforts. We are still unable to provide regular and sustained assistance to 4.7 million people in hard-to-reach areas.

This Council has demanded that the parties to the conflict allow and facilitate humanitarian access, across conflict-lines and across borders. Resolution 2139 is clear and unequivocal on this point. We need a scale up in cross line and cross border deliveries to meet growing needs on the ground. Approximately 1.3 million people could be reached via border crossings we have requested with Turkey, Jordan and Iraq. In previous reports to the Council I proposed the facilitation of cross-border deliveries through the establishment of neutral monitors.

I emphasize, once again, the urgency we face. Thousands of people continue to lose their lives every month. In the continued absence of a political solution to the crisis, humanitarian workers will continue to do everything they can, but we recognize that we cannot do it alone. We look to the Council to help us ensure that the parties to the conflict abide by their obligations under international law. 10.8 million women, men and children depend on that support.

Thank you.