Key Messages

1. The situation in Syria continues to worsen with fighting and violence ongoing in cities around the country, including in Damascus. I remain extremely concerned for the people who are caught up in this. Those who are displaced need food, shelter and medical help. I continue to press for unhindered access for humanitarian organizations. It is our job to help everyone in need of urgent assistance. I remind all those involved to abide by their obligations under international law: civilians must not be targeted.

2. To gain a better understanding of the situation around the country, and to gather more concrete information on what people need, technical staff from United Nations (UN) agencies and the Organization for Islamic Cooperation (OIC) joined the Government-led humanitarian assessment mission, which began on 18 March. The team has so far visited Homs, Hama, Tartous, Idlib, Lattakia and Aleppo with Government and Syrian Arab Red Crescent representatives, and expects to continue to other locations in the next few days.

3. It is critical that we continue to ensure impartiality and neutrality in our response efforts. Humanitarian workers need to be able to access all areas, including pro-opposition areas. It was agreed with the authorities before the mission that if urgent humanitarian needs were identified during the mission, we would mobilize help immediately. The assessment team has been able to talk to people in each place they have visited. People have said that they need food, medicine, blankets, mattresses and other household items.

4. The UN and other humanitarian partners will do their own independent analysis of the assessment. This information will enable us to finalize the preliminary response plan, and scale up our emergency aid to people in desperate need. We are currently able to carry out only limited food, health, and hygiene support activities inside Syria due to insecurity and limited humanitarian access.

5. As Syrians continue to flee the violence and cross into neighbouring countries, it is vital that aid agencies work with the Humanitarian Coordinators in those countries and the newly-appointed regional Humanitarian Coordinator, and with the Red Crescent societies, to strengthen the services and assistance we are able to provide in support of Government efforts in Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey. UNHCR is leading the response for the more than 30,000 refugees who have so far been registered in these countries.