Under-Secretary-General Valerie Amos

Remarks at the launch of the revised Syria Humanitarian Assistance Response Plan and Regional Response Plan

Geneva, 7 June 2013

Excellencies,
Ministers,
High Commissioner Guterres,
Dr. Chan,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

When we last made an appeal for Syria, we hoped we would not have to do it again. But today, we are here to launch the biggest humanitarian appeal ever, for the people of Syria.

The total amount needed for the year for the revised Syria Humanitarian Assistance Response Plan and the Regional Refugee Response Plan comes to $4.4 billion. That’s more than half the combined total of all of our other appeals, which cover sixteen countries from Afghanistan to DRC to Somalia. Thanks to your generosity, both appeals have received around $1.24 billion in funding so far. That leaves $3.1 billion in unmet requirements until the end of the year.

Since the Syria Humanitarian Assistance Response Plan and Regional Refugee Response Plan were launched last December, the situation has deteriorated drastically. The crisis has intensified and spread into most parts of Syria. The crisis, coupled with the impact of economic decline, has caused a steep economic decline, loss of jobs and livelihoods, and increasing vulnerability among large segments of society.

The current events have left Syrian people reeling from the array of negative impacts of the crisis which include the aggravation of poverty; damage to housing and infrastructure; shortages of fuel, which affect the whole economy including electricity and water supplies; disruptions to telecommunications; a rapid shrinkage of the private sector and of the informal sector—which employs a large proportion of the population—leading to livelihood losses and rising unemployment.

We estimate that 6.8 million people now need urgent help. That is one in three Syrians in need of urgent humanitarian assistance. Between January and April, the number of people displaced within Syria more than doubled. As you will hear from High Commissioner Guterres, the situation in the region has worsened dramatically, with over 1.6 million Syrians now sheltering in neighbouring countries and North Africa.
The mission of the United Nations Office for the Co ordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) is to mob ilize and coordinate effective and principled humanitarian action in partnership with national and international actors.

What these figures do is mask a human tragedy. Ordinary women, men and children are bearing the brunt of this crisis. More than 80,000 people have been killed and these figures rise every day. Schools, hospitals and water sanitation plants have been targeted.

Lives are being destroyed. Livelihoods are gone forever. It’s estimated that two years of conflict have set back Syria’s development by two decades.

A report to the UN’s Human Rights Council earlier this week spoke of new levels of brutality including the likely use of chemical weapons and the deployment of thermobaric bombs, which incinerate those caught in the blast and suck oxygen from the lungs of people in the vicinity.

The investigators found that all sides in the conflict have adopted siege tactics, trapping people in their homes and cutting off supplies of food, water, medicines and electricity, in a clear breach of international law.

My colleague Dr. Chan will speak about the health impact of this crisis. With the approach of high summer, hepatitis, typhoid, cholera and dysentery outbreaks are inevitable. The provision of safe drinking water and sanitation has been seriously disrupted and the World Food Programme estimates that four million people are in urgent need of food assistance.

A generation of Syrian children are growing up traumatized by their experiences. Hundreds of thousands have been unable to go to school for months or years. Others attend sporadically or once a week, depending on the security situation. There is an urgent need to deal with the trauma.

Reports of gender-based violence are widespread and shocking. Women and girls talk of sexual violence as a primary reason for fleeing their homes. Parents are marrying off their daughters to family members or others in the community, in an attempt to protect them. UNFPA is at the forefront of the efforts to support people through this traumatic experience.

Palestinian refugees are among the worst affected. According to the UN Relief and Works Agency, all their camps have been engulfed in the conflict and the entire community of 530,000 is in acute crisis. More than half the Palestinian refugees in Syria have been displaced and 60,000 have fled to neighbouring countries.

And the conflict is becoming more divisive and sectarian, threatening minorities not only in Syria but throughout the region. Clashes in Lebanon and bomb attacks in Iraq are a clear sign of the dangerous forces at work.

The impact of the violence and destruction of support infrastructure means that even if a political solution was reached tomorrow, Syrians would still need humanitarian aid in 2014.

Humanitarian agencies are continuing to do their best in these very difficult and dangerous conditions. Nine UN personnel have lost their lives in this conflict so far, and many more have been injured. Our key partner, the Syrian Arab Red Crescent, has lost more than 20 people and many others have been kidnapped. Our convoys have been targeted. I pay tribute to all those workers who continue to carry out lifesaving work in difficult and dangerous circumstances in all of Syria’s governorates.
Since January, the World Food Programme has increased its coverage from 1.5 million to 2.4 million people. Nearly 3 million people have received critical medical supplies; more than a million children have been vaccinated; 360,000 women have been provided with reproductive health kits and around 70,000 women have received emergency obstetric care. Thanks to UNICEF’s support, more than 10.4 million people now have access to clean drinking water.

Since the end of January, joint inter-agency convoys have delivered assistance to more than a million people in hard-to-reach areas, mainly those controlled by opposition groups or where active conflict is taking place.

We have established fully functioning humanitarian hubs in Homs and Tartous. Agencies are continuing to work with the Syrian Arab Red Crescent and local NGOs to reach more people in need every day. We are working to address the bureaucratic constraints on access and talking to groups on the ground on a daily basis to improve our ability to reach those in need.

But the needs continue to grow more quickly than we can meet them. We know that we cannot help everyone who needs it but as the months pass, the crisis threatens new groups of people.

Syria’s farmers are now in a precarious situation and will need help during the planting season to avoid a further rise in food insecurity – something our colleagues at FAO have prioritised. We need to start pre-positioning supplies of warm clothes, blankets and heaters in preparation for next autumn and winter.

Right now, we must increase supplies of safe drinking water and provision of sanitation. We need better early warning systems to prevent outbreaks of disease from turning into epidemics, and we need more bed nets and medical supplies.

That is why UN agencies and our partners have come together to launch this revised appeal. For the SHARP, which covers assistance inside Syria, we need a further $1 billion for this year to add to the $400 million which has already been received. That brings the appeal for help inside Syria to $1.4 billion for the year.

The SHARP includes 22 agencies and humanitarian partners – up from 11 at the beginning of the year. The number of projects has increased from 61 to around 100. All the projects, and the appeal as a whole, are based on sound needs assessments, primary and secondary evidence.

The core of the appeal, accounting for 85 per cent of funding requirements, is made up of life-saving programmes to increase access to food, shelter, water, sanitation and health. We must scale up food distribution to reach 4 million people—and we can do this within the constraints I have outlined; shelter assistance for 3.6 million; safe drinking water for 10 million and provide safe learning spaces for 1.2 million children. The UNRWA Relief and Works Agency must increase its emergency aid to Palestine refugees and sustain its basic health and education services.

Security constraints have had a huge impact on delivery of assistance. We are currently targeting the areas most in need, but only those we know we can access. We will prioritize getting supplies to Aleppo, Rural Damascus, Homs, Dera’a, Idlib and Deir ez Zor. We currently cannot reach the most affected parts of Ar Raqq, so they are not included in the SHARP. This was not an easy decision, but it was one we had to make.

The mission of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) is to mobilize and coordinate effective and principled humanitarian action in partnership with national and international actors.
It will not be easy to raise these funds. Despite the generosity of major donors including Kuwait, the United States, the European Commission, the United Kingdom and Japan, traditional humanitarian funding streams will not be enough.

We are therefore asking your governments to go back to your parliaments and ask for special funding to support Syrians in crisis. On our own side, we need to be innovative and seek funding from every source. We will work with the organizations in the SHARP and the RRP to coordinate our fundraising in a strategic way, including by targeting the general public.

People are appalled by the tragedy they see unfolding in Syria. They are mystified by the inability to find a political solution and by the apparent inertia which has brought us to this point. They know that this is a man-made emergency, and that humanitarian aid is a short-term solution. We will continue to raise our voices at every opportunity and in every possible way and push for a political solution.

In the meantime, we must continue to do all we can to provide assistance to Syrians, whoever they are and wherever they are. On my visits to Syria, Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey, Syrian women and men ask me: Why has the international community abandoned us? I do not have an answer.

Thank you.