UNDER-SECRETARY-GENERAL FOR HUMANITARIAN AFFAIRS AND EMERGENCY RELIEF COORDINATOR, VALÉRIE AMOS
PRESS STATEMENT AT THE SYRIA HUMANITARIAN FORUM

Geneva, 19 February 2013

Checked against delivery

This is the seventh Syria Humanitarian Forum and the focus of today’s forum was on securing access to the millions of Syrians who desperately need help.

The situation in Syria is getting worse. The violence is causing widespread destruction and having a devastating impact on the lives of ordinary Syrian, women, men and children. On my fourth visit to Damascus in January, I was conscious of the constant shelling and I have seen first-hand the destruction of lives, of infrastructure and the erosion of basic social services like health and education.

The UN estimates that 70,000 people have been killed since the beginning of the crisis. People do not feel safe or secure. The number of people in need has quadrupled since June last year.

More than half of Syria’s public hospitals have been damaged. Many of those that are open lack basic supplies like antibiotics and pain killers. One in five schools has either been destroyed or is being used as a collective shelter. Some 400,000 out of about 500,000 Palestinian refugees need humanitarian assistance.

And the flow of people out of the country continues unabated. Over an eight-week period from mid-December, 255,000 Syrians fled their country. Out of the 860,000 refugee total, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey are together sheltering 97 per cent of them. We are all very grateful to the Governments and people of these four countries, and all countries that have kept their borders open to Syrian refugees.

Humanitarian agencies are trying to keep up with the rising needs. The World Food Programme is scaling up to meet the needs of 2.5 million people by April. About half of their current 1.75 million beneficiaries are staying in opposition-controlled or contested areas. The UN Children’s Fund, UNICEF, and the World Health Organization with their partners have reached more than a million children with vaccination campaigns against polio and measles, many in areas held by opposition groups.

We are crossing conflict lines, negotiating with armed groups on the ground, to reach more people in need. But we are not reaching enough of those who require our help. Limited access in the north is a major problem that we can only solve using alternative methods of aid delivery.
We know that humanitarian action alone cannot solve the problems facing the Syrian people. This crisis requires a political solution and I hope that all who have influence with the parties will succeed in bringing them to the negotiating table as soon as possible. We are watching a humanitarian tragedy unfold before our eyes. We must do all we can to reassure the people that we care and that we will not let them down.

Today’s Forum was an important opportunity for us to exchange views and take a common approach to the very serious challenges we face in bringing help to the people of Syria. I thank the Government of Switzerland for hosting the Forum.