



**UNDER-SECRETARY-GENERAL FOR HUMANITARIAN AFFAIRS AND  
EMERGENCY RELIEF COORDINATOR, MARK LOWCOCK**

**Statement to the Security Council on the humanitarian situation in Syria**

Amman, 30 October 2017

*As delivered*

Madame President,

This is my second briefing to you on the humanitarian situation in Syria. In Amman today I have discussed the position with the Jordanian authorities and the UN humanitarian leadership team based in the region. One conclusion is obvious: the impact of the Syria crisis continues to be profound. My briefing today focuses on the humanitarian issues inside Syria. High Commissioner Grandi will speak to you on the refugee situation on Thursday.

More than 13 million people inside Syria still need humanitarian assistance. 6.3 million of them are exceptionally vulnerable and in acute need as a result of displacement, hostilities, and limited access to basic goods and services. Conflict and violations of international humanitarian law continue to be the principal drivers of humanitarian need, with civilians in many parts of the country enduring massive suffering.

Military operations and hostilities in some parts of the country, particularly in the east, continue to drive displacement. The number of long-term internally displaced people (IDPs) has decreased from 6.3 to 6.1 million over the past year, while IDP returns, especially of those temporarily displaced, have been increasing in some parts of the country. But levels of new displacement remain high, with some 1.8 million reported to have been displaced between January and September.

Madame President,

I want to flag some specific current problems which particularly concern me, and then I will summarise where we are on the humanitarian response.



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I am worried about the impact of fighting and airstrikes on civilians and civilian infrastructure in Raqqa governorate, with scores of civilians reportedly killed in recent months. ISIL may be largely pushed out of Raqqa, but after years of oppression and almost a year of intense fighting, humanitarian needs will continue to be large for some time to come. Since the beginning of the anti-ISIL offensive in November last year, airstrikes and clashes have resulted in more than 436,000 people being displaced from Raqqa to 60 different locations, including in neighbouring governorates.

I am also concerned for the safety and protection of civilians at risk from unexploded ordinance throughout Raqqa city, particularly those trying to return to their homes. Despite the directive issued by local authorities for civilians not to return to the city until it is deemed safe, the UN anticipates that people will go back to try to check on and protect their homes and their personal assets.

Further to the east, in Deir Ez-Zor governorate, heavy fighting and airstrikes continue to result in civilian deaths and injuries. Large-scale displacement also continues, with IOM reporting some 350,000 people displaced since August, including more than 250,000 people in October alone.

In mid-October, in Al Mayadin city and surrounding areas in Deir Ez-Zor governorate, around 15,000 people were reportedly without access to health services following air strikes on the city, rendering hospitals and medical points inoperable. UNICEF and WHO report that the attacks on Al Mayadin destroyed a vaccine cold room, with at least 140,000 doses of UN-provided measles and polio vaccines lost. Until a new cold room is built and the required cold chain equipment – including solar fridges, cold boxes and vaccine carriers – are delivered, routine immunization for vulnerable children in the area will be delayed. This is a particular setback for efforts to check one of the world's largest polio outbreaks in recent memory, an outbreak which continues to plague Deir Ez-Zor in particular, with new cases continuing to be reported.

In Homs governorate, over a period of 20 days this month, ISIL reportedly executed at least 128 people in reprisal killings, accusing them of collaboration with the Syrian government.

And an estimated 50,000 Syrians remain stranded in the desert in Rukban on the 'Berm' along the Syrian-Jordanian border. In the last year there have been only two distributions of UN humanitarian food assistance to these people and it has been four months since the last partial distribution. As limited commercial supplies are reaching Rukban, access to food is precarious and the overall situation remains dire. As the winter months approach, this situation will become even more acute. Ongoing assessments and data collected through the UN health clinic underscore the fragility of the situation. A long-term durable solution to the plight of these people has to be found. Meanwhile immediate access to enable life-saving assistance for the



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civilian population is critical. Clearly the best approach is to find a solution from within Syria. We are straining every sinew to do that. Whatever happens, it is our collective duty to avoid yet another humanitarian catastrophe in Syria.

Madame President,

Nearly three million people in Syria continue to live in besieged and hard-to-reach areas.

In eastern Ghouta daily shelling has continued to be reported in recent weeks. Humanitarian access to eastern Ghouta – one of the four de-escalated areas where nearly 95 per cent of Syria's besieged population lives – has been severely curtailed for months. Since the start of the year 110,000 people have received food assistance, out of an estimated population of nearly 400,000. Today the UN and partners delivered food, nutrition and health assistance to 40,000 people. An alarming number of child malnutrition cases have been recorded there, and more than 400 people with health problems require medical evacuation. I join the call of the World Food Programme (WFP) and others for unimpeded humanitarian access.

Madame President,

Against this background, the UN and our partners continue to implement in Syria one of the largest humanitarian operations in the world. We are reaching millions of people on a monthly basis. For example, in September WFP provided food assistance to more than 3.3 million people, UNICEF reached over 1.5 million people, and WHO reached over 800,000 people. We have just completed a major piece of work to analyse implementation of activities so far this year, and I have separately made available to you new data on that.

I would like to update you on the position on, first, humanitarian assistance to areas controlled by the Government of Syria; second, cross-line activities; and third, cross-border activities.

Between January and August of this year, UN and NGO programmes, implemented in close cooperation with various line ministries of the Syrian Government have reached an average of well over 4 million people a month in government-controlled areas of the country. These programmes continue to represent the vast majority of our work inside Syria.

Next, cross-line activities. We continue to face considerable challenges in meeting the humanitarian needs of people in hard-to-reach and besieged locations. As the Secretary-General



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pointed out to you in his monthly report, there is an expectation that progress in de-escalation will result in increased humanitarian access. While we continue alongside others to work hard on the issue, this has yet to materialize. Since the beginning of the year, on average fewer than a quarter of the UN inter-agency cross-line convoys requested under the monthly and bi-monthly plans have been able to proceed. And thus far in October, inter-agency convoys collectively reached fewer than 200,000 people. On average only 10 per cent of people in besieged locations were reached with UN assistance each month this year and that is the total we are also at now for October given the deliveries today.

The removal of life-saving medicines and medical supplies continues. We have briefed you on that before.

I hope that, in the coming days, real and tangible progress can be made on cross-line activities, through the trilateral coordination mechanism in Damascus.

Madame President,

As I said last month, it remains our view that cross-border assistance provided for in Security Council resolution 2165 has been a lifeline. This assistance has allowed the UN to reach millions of people in need in northern and southern parts of Syria. Since UN cross-border operations began in July 2014, we have deployed more than 16,400 trucks carrying assistance through authorised crossings into Syria. On average, aid was delivered to 2.76 million people a month through cross-border operations between January and August of this year. A considerable proportion of the many millions in need – in both northern and southern Syria – have been regularly reached; not just once or twice, but consistently and systematically throughout the last three years. Our experience with cross-line operations from within Syria, which I have just referred to, leads us to believe that it would be impossible to reach those people in a sustained manner from within Syria. I therefore regard a renewal of resolution 2165 as essential. Millions of people depend on the activities it mandates.

Thank you Madame President.