

Joint Statement on hard-to-reach and besieged communities in Syria

Statement is attributable to Yacoub El Hillo, UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator in Syria and Kevin Kennedy, Regional Humanitarian Coordinator for the Syria Crisis.

Damascus, 7 January 2016, The UN calls for unimpeded humanitarian access to reach those in need in hard-to-reach and besieged areas in Syria. We are particularly concerned about the plight of nearly 400,000 people besieged by parties to the conflict in locations such as Deir Ez-Zor city, Daraya, Foah and Kafraya, as well as besieged areas of East Ghouta. In the last year, only 10 per cent of all requests for UN inter-agency convoys to hard-to-reach and besieged areas were approved and delivered.

Almost 42,000 people remaining in Madaya are at risk of further hunger and starvation. The UN has received credible reports of people dying from starvation and being killed while trying to leave. On 5 January 2016, a 53 year-old man reportedly died of starvation while his family of five continues to suffer from severe malnutrition.

Up to 4.5 million people in Syria live in hard-to-reach areas including nearly 400,000 people in 15 besieged locations who do not have access to the life-saving aid they urgently need. The ongoing conflict continues to hamper the humanitarian response and freedom of movement is restricted by the presence of armed actors and landmines. Madaya last received a joint UN/SARC/ICRC convoy on 18 October 2015 and medical evacuations in December, but has been inaccessible since then despite numerous requests for access. The UN welcomes today's approval from the Government of Syria to access Madaya, Foah and Kefraya and is preparing to deliver humanitarian assistance in the coming days.

International humanitarian law prohibits the targeting of civilians. It also prohibits the starvation of civilians as a tactic of war. The UN calls for immediate humanitarian access to all hard-to-reach and besieged areas and for the facilitation of safe evacuation of civilians.

For further information, please contact:

Ghalia Seifo, Damascus, seifo@un.org, Tel: +963 953 300 078

Linda Tom, Amman, toml@un.org, Tel: +962 79 141882

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