

OCHA OPERATIONS DIRECTOR: HUMANITARIANS MUST HAVE ACCESS TO MAKE SURE AID REACHES SYRIANS IN DESPERATE NEED

(New York, 29 January 2013) OCHA Operations Director John Ging visited Syria and Turkey last week to find ways of reaching more people in more places, faster and more effectively.

“In Syria I travelled with seven UN Emergency Directors to Damascus and Rif Damascus, Dera’a, Homs and Talbiseh. We were shocked by the scale of devastation and the appalling living conditions that we saw. People’s needs are growing more acute as coping mechanisms collapse,” said Mr. Ging when he spoke to the press in New York on Monday.

“Humanitarians must obtain access to all areas and by whatever routes are most effective. Our experience of the past 22 months convinces us that cross-line access from within Syria, while vital, is just not enough to reach everyone, everywhere. We therefore need agreement to cross borders, irrespective of whose control they are under. This is particularly urgent in the North as without it we cannot reach the vast majority who are in need in the Opposition-held areas there,” he emphasized.

The Syrian authorities have not yet given their agreement to cross borders which are not under their operational control. Mr. Ging highlighted this as an urgent priority to be able to fully implement the Syrian Humanitarian Response Plan. “We cannot stand by when we know that by crossing borders we would be able to deliver a much higher volume of aid to people. We have identified a solution and we need the agreement now. There is no time to lose.”

In Turkey, Mr. Ging met representatives of the Syrian National Coalition's humanitarian unit, the Assistance Coordination Unit (ACU). “I had very productive meetings with the ACU leadership last week. They asked the United Nations to do more to help more Syrians in need. It is clear that we all want the same – to lessen people’s suffering and improve the delivery of humanitarian aid, and we look forward to working with the ACU effectively and in accordance with humanitarian principles, to help the Syrian people.”

In these discussions, John Ging also reiterated the importance of the neutral role the UN plays in delivering aid in Syria. “Almost half the food assistance is delivered in disputed or Opposition-controlled areas. No funding is provided directly to the Syrian Government.” He also emphasized that with poor funding – only 50 per cent in 2012 – the quantity of aid was falling far short of the needs identified. Mr. Ging also noted that it is hoped that the upcoming Kuwait conference will deliver this urgently-needed funding so that aid operations can be scaled up quickly and significantly.

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