

**UNDER-SECRETARY-GENERAL FOR HUMANITARIAN AFFAIRS AND
EMERGENCY RELIEF COORDINATOR, STEPHEN O'BRIEN
STATEMENT ON SYRIA**

I am deeply frustrated and saddened that the UN and its humanitarian partners have been forced to abort current plans to evacuate critically injured and sick people from eastern Aleppo city.

The UN and partners were ready to evacuate critically injured people over the last few days. They engaged in long and demanding negotiations, and endless rounds of clarifications on conditions and guarantees with all parties. The Syrian Arab Red Crescent, the International Committee of the Red Cross and Syrian medical NGOs joined in the meticulous planning of the evacuations.

It is deeply regrettable that no patients or accompanying family members could be moved. The evacuations were obstructed by various factors, including delays in receiving the necessary approvals from local authorities in eastern Aleppo, conditions placed by non-State armed groups and the Government of Syria's objection to allowing medical and other relief supplies into the eastern part of the city.

After three days of lull, parties to the conflict have still not agreed, military operations have resumed and violence is now escalating. The political and military paths are trumping basic humanity once again in Syria.

I am outraged that the fate of vulnerable civilians – sick and injured people, children and the elderly, all in need of critical and life-saving support – rests mercilessly in the hands of parties who have consistently and unashamedly failed to put them above narrow political and military interests. All parties to the conflict have a duty to protect civilians and ensure that the sick and wounded have access to medical care. These obligations are not favours to be granted; they are fundamental tenets of international humanitarian law and must be met by each party regardless of the actions of the other.

While it is extremely challenging for humanitarians to operate under these circumstances, we will not be deterred. We will continue to do all we can to see that those who desperately need humanitarian assistance and medical care are not forgotten.

As I have said before, we are facing an unparalleled humanitarian catastrophe in eastern Aleppo. Due to the violence and besiegement, east Aleppo has not been reached with humanitarian assistance since early July of this year. I urgently call on all parties to the conflict and Member States with influence over them to immediately work towards a permanent and comprehensive ceasefire so that life-saving humanitarian activities, including medical evacuations, can resume.

Each and every one of us must urgently look and ask what we can do to prevent the needless death and injury of hundreds of thousands of civilians and the inevitable destruction of Aleppo before it is too late.

(New York, 24 October 2016)

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