



Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

**ON BEHALF OF THE UNDER-SECRETARY-GENERAL FOR
HUMANITARIAN AFFAIRS AND EMERGENCY RELIEF
COORDINATOR, MR. MARK LOWCOCK, UNITED NATIONS OFFICE
FOR THE COORDINATION OF HUMANITARIAN AFFAIRS OFFICER-
IN-CHARGE, DIRECTOR OF ADVOCACY AND OPERATIONS, REENA
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**BRIEFING TO THE SECURITY COUNCIL ON THE HUMANITARIAN
SITUATION IN SYRIA**

New York, 29 November 2018

As delivered

Mr. President, distinguished Council members,

I provide this update today on behalf of the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, Mr. Mark Lowcock.

I would like to start with the situation in northwestern Syria where there have been reports of mortars, including some shells reportedly containing chlorine gas, hitting three densely populated neighborhoods in western Aleppo city: Nile Street, Khalidiyah and Zahraa. People with respiratory symptoms were rushed to the two main hospitals in the area. WHO has provided support to both hospitals and stands ready to provide further public health support as required.

As the Secretary-General has repeatedly stressed, any confirmed use of chemical weapons is abhorrent and a clear violation of international law.

We have also received reports of airstrikes in Idlib Governorate on 24 and 25 November – the first such airstrikes in more than two months. These latest developments demonstrate the fragility of the situation and the urgent need for sustained engagement by all sides to preserve the gains of the agreement which was

reached between the Republic of Turkey and the Russian Federation on 17 September. The stakes remain high as the alternative is humanitarian suffering on a scale that would devastate a population of some three million people in northwestern Syria who have known nothing but war and suffering in recent years.

Mr. President,

In Rukban, between 3-8 November, the UN together with the Syrian Arab Red Crescent was finally able to reach some 50,000 people – three-quarters of them women and children. This aid operation approved by the Government of Syria and facilitated by the Russian Federation and the United States – was the first major delivery of material assistance to people in Rukban since January this year, and the first time that aid has been delivered from within Syria. Our teams also vaccinated more than 5,000 children together with officials from the Syrian Ministry of Health. Colleagues returned shocked from what they saw on the ground, reporting grave protection issues, increasing food insecurity and no certified medical doctors among the stranded population. Given the gravity of the situation, the Secretary-General has called for the deployment of a further convoy to the area as a matter of priority. Without sustained access, the situation of tens of thousands of Syrians – stranded in the harshest desert conditions – will only further deteriorate as the winter cold sets in.

Most people inside the makeshift settlement have stated a desire to return to their homes. But many are terrified of what the future may hold for them, whether it is in Government areas or locations held by non-State armed groups. A durable solution that is safe, voluntary and dignified -- one that adequately addresses protection concerns -- is urgently needed for the population in Rukban.

Mr. President,

We are seriously concerned about reports -- increasing in number -- of civilian casualties due to air strikes and ground fighting in south-eastern Deir-ez-Zor Governorate. Many civilians are reported among the dead and injured. Some 6,000 have been displaced from the ISIL-controlled Hajin enclave since October, with an estimated 10,000 people remaining inside. Most are unable to access assistance and face severe protection risks. Of those who have been displaced, many live in dire conditions in makeshift settlements, with some dangerously close to the frontlines.

Despite considerable challenges in accessing areas of displacement due to insecurity and geographic isolation, local UN humanitarian partners have continued to provide assistance to IDPs in the Gharanij and Bahra areas. This includes multi-sector assistance provided to 6,000 IDPs. We reiterate that under international law, parties to the conflict must protect civilians against attack, treat them humanely, and allow and facilitate the delivery of humanitarian relief.

We are also deeply troubled by reports of restrictions in northeastern Syria, where half of some 102,000 children enrolled in Government-run schools are facing impediments in accessing their schools, especially in Qamishli and Hassakeh cities. An estimated 10,000 children have not been able to attend school at all since late September. Vehicles, including school buses and private cars, have been prevented from crossing check-points if they are carrying children going to schools teaching the nationally accredited curriculum. Over the past weeks, the UN has been engaged in efforts with all concerned parties to advocate for children to be able to go safely to a school of their choosing. Across Syria, the conflict continues to have a devastating impact on children, including to their access to education. An estimated 180,000 teachers are no longer in service. Some 40 per cent of schools have been damaged or destroyed, and many others have been used to shelter displaced people. All Syrian children have a right to education without discrimination, and this right must be protected, respected and fulfilled.

Mr. President,

Despite the very difficult conditions, the United Nations and its partners are committed to reaching all those in need, wherever they are. Over this past year, an average of almost 5.4 million people were reached with humanitarian assistance each month through all possible avenues, from within Syria to areas under government control, from within Syria across conflict lines, and from across the border.

Mr. President,

Cross-border aid remains a critical part of the UN's response in Syria. This month alone, nearly 600,000 people in Syria have received United Nations food assistance delivered across the border with Turkey through the crossings at Bab al-Salam and Bab al-Hawa. Cross-border deliveries also included medicines, educational supplies and other non-food items for hundreds of thousands of people. Humanitarian

organizations have just completed the vaccination of more than 12,500 children, aged between six months and 15 years against measles and rubella in Idleb Governorate, using supplies that were delivered across the border. Thousands more benefited from education supplies and services, school rehabilitation and textbooks.

UN cross-border assistance is checked and verified by the United Nations Monitoring Mechanism at designated border crossing points. Every truck is checked to ensure it only contains humanitarian supplies. Deliveries are confirmed by UN-contracted third-party monitors upon arrival at warehouses inside Syria. They check the items being off-loaded against the waybill. Then there is post-distribution monitoring, again, including by independent third parties and through feedback received from affected communities. UN cross-border assistance is also subject to the normal accountability mechanisms between the donors and the delivery agencies, which also includes another verification system.

Mr. President,

Currently, some 4.3 million people in need live in areas outside the control of the Government. That accounts for more than one-third of all people in need of assistance in Syria. It includes almost three million people in need in areas exclusively reached through cross-border operations. The United Nations does not have an alternative means of reaching these people as access from within the country is impeded. It is for that reason that the Secretary-General has called for a renewal of resolution 2165 for an additional twelve months. The renewal of this Council's resolution will continue to save lives. Millions of people depend on your decision.

Thank you, Mr. President.