

STATEMENT TO THE PRESS ON THE SITUATION IN SYRIA

**UNDER-SECRETARY-GENERAL FOR HUMANITARIAN AFFAIRS AND
EMERGENCY RELIEF COORDINATOR, VALERIE AMOS**

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The humanitarian situation in Syria is already catastrophic and is clearly getting worse. Four million people face unrelenting violence and violations of their human rights, and we continue to see the terrible damage being caused by heavy weapons used in urban centres. People are living in constant fear of bombing or sexual violence and there is lack of food, shelter and urgent medical attention.

The harsh winter is exacerbating the already appalling conditions. More than 650,000 people have left the country, and I would like to thank neighbouring countries, and particularly Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan, in that respect. But we have also seen people flee to North Africa and to Europe. Domestically, this is having an impact in countries like Jordan, Lebanon and, of course, Turkey, because people of those countries are asking tough questions of their Governments about the number of people that will be allowed to come in. We have, therefore, been very grateful to those countries for keeping their borders open, but there is a regional impact which we are very conscious of.

Our colleagues from the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights tell us that 60,000 people have lost their lives. Ordinary people are paying a terrible price for the failure of the international community to agree steps to resolve this political crisis. Day after day we are all seeing and hearing appalling reports on our television screens, on the internet and in the newspapers of more violence and hardship, thanks to those in the media who continue to cover this crisis.

The emergency and operations directors from eight UN agencies were in Syria and Lebanon this week. They expressed shock at what they saw, they were very clear that the effect of nearly two years of conflict has had a terrible impact on people, especially on children. I repeat: four million people need help, two million are internally displaced, and 400,000 out of 500,000 Palestinians refugees have been affected.

When I visited the region in December, women told me harrowing stories of the violence they had witnessed, including rape and torture. Many have fled to other countries because of their fears for themselves and for their children.

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What we are seeing now are the consequences of the failure of the international community to unite and to resolve the political crisis after nearly two years. I hope that there is no doubt left in the mind of our political leaders as to the scale of the human tragedy unfolding in Syria. While we on the humanitarian side cannot end the political crisis or the fighting, the humanitarian community continues to try to do more to help Syrians caught up in the conflict. We are, of course, frustrated by the many challenges we face inside Syria, but every month we and our partners are feeding more people, delivering basic relief items, and supplementing basic health and education services.

Despite the extremely dangerous security environment our colleagues face every day - working with Syrian community organizations, the Syrian Arab Red Crescent and many other partners - we are making a difference. But it is just not enough, especially as we cannot keep pace with the rising number of people in acute need. We must find ways to reach more people, especially in the areas we are still unable to get to, and where there is on-going fighting. It is possible to negotiate access, we saw that last week, but it is slow, it is painstaking, and it requires agreement with all parties every step of the way, even for only a few hours and to move only metres or kilometres.

We need more people, we need more partners, and we need to be able to deliver more quickly.

We continue to talk to the authorities in Syria and other parties every day to speed up slow administrative procedures, improve understanding of what we do and why we are there, and build the trust of communities who need our help. All parties involved in this conflict must abide by their obligations under international humanitarian law to protect ordinary people and also to protect aid workers.

We also need more resources. The humanitarian community has requested US\$1.5 billion to help displaced people and the communities hosting them in Syria - and in neighbouring countries - for the next six months.

There is a funding conference on the 30th of this month, in Kuwait, which will be hosted by the Secretary-General of the UN and the Emir of Kuwait. We hope that the conference will yield the resources we need. If we do not receive these funds, we will not be able to reach the poorest and most vulnerable families who so desperately need our help.

We must not forget that the bulk of the humanitarian aid is being provided by Syrians to other Syrians, and I am inspired by the courage and dedication of humanitarian staff and volunteers in Syria who are doing all they can to help people in need. We must do all we can to support them.