UN CHIEFS URGE SUSTAINED SUPPORT TO SYRIANS AND THE REGION AHEAD OF FOURTH BRUSSELS CONFERENCE

(New York/Geneva, 29 June 2020) – On the eve of the fourth Supporting Syria and the Region conference in Brussels 30 June, the United Nations urged international donors to redouble their commitment to Syrians and the region.

The Heads of the UN’s humanitarian, development, and refugee agencies called for solidarity with countries hosting record levels of refugees and continued support to the UN’s programmes that are saving lives, protecting vulnerable families, building resilience across Syria and the region and pursuing durable solutions to end civilian suffering.

The appeal comes with additional urgency as the impact of COVID-19 wreaks havoc on economies and threatens to further destabilize the region.

Governments and other donors are expected to announce pledges of support for a US$3.8 billion appeal for the UN and partners’ humanitarian work inside Syria and a $6.04 billion refugee and resilience plan for countries in Syria’s neighborhood. The plans are currently 30 per cent and 19 per cent funded, respectively.

Inside Syria, more than 11 million people need aid and protection. While hostilities have decreased overall, there are tensions and flare-ups of violence in the northwest, northeast and the south, including resurgence of ISIL-affiliated groups.

“The conflict in Syria has lasted almost as long as the First and Second World War combined,” Emergency Relief Coordinator Mark Lowcock said. “A whole generation of children has known nothing but hardship, destruction and deprivation. Nearly 2.5 million children are out of school. The economy is crumbling, millions remain displaced, and more and more people are going hungry. The world can do something about that tomorrow. Generous pledges, quickly paid out, can help the UN and humanitarian NGOs stay the course in Syria and get people the food, shelter, health services and protection they urgently need.”

Half the pre-war population – more than 13.2 million people - remain displaced inside and outside the country. This is the largest refugee crisis in the world with 6.6 million refugees scattered throughout the world. The vast majority – over 5.5 million refugees – live in Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq and Egypt.

After nearly a decade of hosting some of the world’s most vulnerable people, host governments are struggling to sustain services to refugees. The situation is compounded by the disastrous socio-economic impact of COVID-19. Recent data point to sharp economic downturns and spiraling impoverishment in host countries. Robust efforts are needed to support the most vulnerable and preserve stability.
Millions of refugees have lost their livelihoods, are taking on debt and are increasingly unable to meet their basic needs. There is increased risk of child labour, gender-based violence, early marriage and other forms of exploitation.

“The COVID-19 crisis has had an immediate and devastating impact on livelihoods of millions of Syrian refugees and their hosts in the region,” said UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Filippo Grandi. “The most vulnerable in the society - including millions of refugees - have lost their already fragile and meager income. They are sliding deeper into poverty and debt. The international community must come together with sustained and predictable support for Syrian refugees and the countries and communities in the region that have generously hosted them for years.”

Neighbouring countries have continued to express their commitment to hosting refugees, but robust support and responsibility sharing from the international community is urgently needed. Without this, the hard-won gains made over the past years risk being lost, with potentially disastrous human and political consequences.

“The economic crisis now crashing upon an already-strained region is rolling back development and putting unbearable pressure on governments and communities hosting refugees in the region,” said Achim Steiner, Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme. “Millions of people who just months ago were struggling to stay out of poverty, have now completely lost their livelihoods. As an international community, we must send a strong sign of solidarity by increasing support for neighbouring countries hosting refugees from Syria.”

So far in 2020, the UN and its partners in Syria have delivered assistance to an average of 6.2 million people each month, including lifesaving food for 4.5 million people across all 14 governorates.

In Syria and the region, partners have stepped up as needs have grown with the COVID-19 crisis. While delivering comprehensive protection, humanitarian and resilience support reaching millions of people, the UN's plans also include specific COVID-19 measures to address the most pressing needs.

At last year's conference in Brussels, the international community confirmed a total of US$7 billion in funding to support humanitarian, resilience and development activities in 2019. All pledges have been paid in full, and donors contributed additional funds during 2019.

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