Statement attributed to Ali Al-Za’tari, UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator in Syria, on the immediate need for a cessation of hostilities to protect and assist civilians

Damascus, 12 February 2018

Since our statement of 6 February, when the UN representatives in Syria called for a one-month cessation of hostilities, the situation has worsened, as clearly and strongly stated by the statements of the UN Secretary-General and the High Commissioner for Human Rights, released recently. The escalation is taking its cruelest toll on civilians, everywhere in Syria. We are witnessing some of the worst fighting of the entire conflict, with reports of hundreds of civilian deaths and injuries, massive displacement and the destruction of civilian infrastructure, including medical facilities.

We keep stressing our message, that this terrible suffering of the Syrian people must stop. They have already borne the brunt of this brutal conflict. Yet, sadly, the call for an immediate cessation of hostilities to enable the delivery of humanitarian assistance and the protection of civilians, including the evacuation of the critically ill and wounded, has gone unanswered. I am again appealing to all parties, and those with influence over them, to listen to us and to the affected population: end this intolerable human suffering. History will record failure to stop the fighting and will lay the blame on those responsible. We need to reach people in need with relief now not later.

All the parties involved have a responsibility, under international humanitarian and human rights law, to take all necessary measures to protect civilians and civilian infrastructure, and to allow for safe, sustained and unimpeded humanitarian access to all in need. All parties must act now.

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