



**UNDER-SECRETARY-GENERAL FOR HUMANITARIAN AFFAIRS AND
EMERGENCY RELIEF COORDINATOR, MARK LOWCOCK**

Statement to the Security Council on the humanitarian situation in Syria

27 March 2018

As delivered

Mr. President, members of the Security Council,

As you all know, the Syrian conflict has now entered its eighth year. When weapons speak, civilians pay the price. A relentless price, with horrific violence, bloodshed and unspeakable suffering.

The last few months have been some of the worst yet for many civilians inside Syria.

I want to start today with the situation in eastern Ghouta. Since the passing of Resolution 2401 on 24 February, military operations – airstrikes in particular – in eastern Ghouta reportedly killed more than 1,700 people. Thousands more were injured.

Attacks on critical civilian infrastructure like medical facilities continue to be reported. There have been at least 28 reported attacks on health facilities since mid-February and more than 70 verified incidents since the beginning of this year. WHO has reported that attacks on health facilities, health workers, and health infrastructure were recorded during the first two months of 2018 at three times the rate we saw during the course of 2017.

In Damascus city, at least 78 people were reportedly killed and another 230 injured by shells fired from eastern Ghouta in recent weeks. They include reports of at least 35 people killed and scores wounded on 20 March when Kashkul market in Jaramana, a south-eastern suburb of the city, was struck by a rocket.



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Mr. President,

Tens of thousands of civilians have been displaced from Duma, Harasta, Saqba and Kafr Batna in recent days and weeks. So far, reports indicate that some 80,000 civilians have been taken to places in Damascus city and Rural Damascus. Nearly 20,000 combatants and civilians have been transported to locations in north-western Syria.

Nearly 52,000 civilians from eastern Ghouta are currently being hosted in eight collective shelters in Rural Damascus. This is a displaced population which has endured months of limited access to food, medical care or other essential items. In the words of the UN's Humanitarian Coordinator Ali Al-Za'atari, who has met and spoken to some of them, these people are "tired, hungry, traumatized and afraid."

Most of the collective shelters do not have the capacity or infrastructure to accommodate such large numbers of people. They are extremely overcrowded and severely lacking in basic water, sanitation and hygiene facilities. There are a number of serious protection concerns, related to risks of gender-based violence, unaccompanied and separated children, and restrictions on movement.

Mr. President,

The United Nations is not in charge of the management of these shelters. However, since 13 March, together with humanitarian partners, the United Nations has mobilized a rapid response to provide evacuees with basic support, in close coordination with the Syrian Arab Red Crescent and other local partners. So far, more than 130,000 non-food items have been distributed, 130 emergency toilets have been installed, and water trucking services have been provided to most shelters. Additionally, supplies to feed over 50,000 people and a total of 38 mobile health teams and 18 mobile medical teams are currently providing support to those in need inside the shelters.



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Mr. President,

Humanitarian organisations also need access to people still trapped inside eastern Ghouta – in Duma in particular, where fighting and besiegement continue.

The United Nations and its partners are ready to proceed to Duma with food for up to 16,500 people, as well as health, nutrition and water, sanitation and hygiene supplies. But facilitation letters have to be signed by the Government of Syria.

I reiterate the Secretary-General's call for all parties to fully respect international humanitarian and human rights law, to ensure immediate humanitarian access and guarantee the protection of civilians, including in relation to displacements and evacuations.

The UN and its partners require unimpeded access to all those affected by the situation in eastern Ghouta. This means access to areas where civilians remain, transit and exit to, like collective shelters, in order to ensure that effective protection mechanisms are in place, so that we can deter any possible violations and that we can provide remedial protection support.

Mr. President,

Eastern Ghouta is not the only place in which humanitarian needs continue to rise. In north-west Syria, in recent weeks, an estimated 183,500 people have been displaced by hostilities in Afrin district in Aleppo Governorate. The majority, some 140,000 people, have fled to Tal Refaat and the remainder have gone to Nubul, Zahraa, Menbij and Hassakeh and surrounding areas. This massive influx of IDPs is putting a strain on host communities, which are already overwhelmed.

Two days ago, on 25 March, an inter-agency convoy to Tal Refaat delivered assistance for some 50,000 people. Overall, however, humanitarian partners are



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still struggling to gain sustainable access to this area. Moreover, access to Aleppo City for IDPs from Afrin district is currently restricted. Of particular concern are medical evacuations that are urgently required for severely sick people to receive care in specialized hospitals in Aleppo City. Four deaths due to the lack of proper healthcare have already been reported.

Between 50,000 and 70,000 people are estimated still to be in Afrin City. Humanitarian access to the City and its outer perimeters is possible through cross-border operations mandated by this Council. The government of Turkey have told us today that they are positively disposed towards this, and we plan to run convoys in the very near future. We know that needs are very substantial.

Mr. President,

In Idleb Governorate, the situation remains catastrophic, with almost 400,000 people displaced since mid-December. Local capacity to assist is overstretched. Thousands of additional people are now coming there from eastern Ghouta, with no sites or shelters available for the vast majority of them.

Still in Idleb, we have received reports of an increase in violence in recent days. According to local sources, on 20 March, airstrikes hit an IDP shelter in the outskirts of Haas village in southern rural Idleb Governorate, reportedly killing at least ten displaced people and injuring another 15. On 21 March, airstrikes on Kafr Battikh village, also in southern rural Idleb Governorate, reportedly killed scores more. The next day, the central market in Harim town was hit by an airstrike, reportedly killing 35 people, including many women and children.

Mr. President,

Airstrikes also resumed in southern Syria on 12 March, with attacks being reported in and around Dar'a City. There have not been airstrikes in these areas since an



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agreement was reached last year on the creation of a de-escalation zone for parts of the south of the country. This therefore appears to be a major unwelcome development.

Mr. President,

Let me turn to Raqqa. On 19 March, we received approval from the Syrian authorities for an assessment mission to Raqqa city by the United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS), the United Nations Department of Safety and Security (UNDSS), the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and the World Health Organization (WHO).

As you know, we have been seeking agreement to this for some time

That was on 19 March. Three days later, on 22 March UNDSS deployed a team to conduct a security assessment. They report that while the city is considered “calm and stable,” considerable risk remains. Raqqa City is still highly contaminated with landmines, unexploded ordnances, explosive remnants of war, and improvised explosive devices. We hope access to Raqqa City should be possible for humanitarian aid deliveries via Qamishly, Menbij, Aleppo, Hama and Homs, depending on operational and logistical arrangements. The United Nations and partners are now preparing a humanitarian assessment mission, which is likely to take place next week.

Next Rukban, on the Syria-Jordan border. The UN and its partners received permission from the Syrian authorities on 8 March to organize a humanitarian convoy from Damascus to people in need along the Syria-Jordan border. Last week, on 19 March, the United Nations received permission to join this humanitarian mission. Preparations are ongoing, and a first humanitarian convoy is expected to deploy soon. As you know, we have been seeking approval for this for many months.



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Mr. President,

As we sit here today, almost at the end of the month, we have reached some 137,000 people in need through inter-agency convoys to Tal Refaat, Dar Kabira and Duma. This is limited incremental progress compared to the first parts of the year, thanks to the extraordinary efforts of the team on the ground and some of you around this table.

But we are essentially just given crumbs – an occasional convoy here and there, often, coincidentally, shortly before our monthly briefings to you. 5.6 million Syrians in acute need cannot live on crumbs. And with a quarter of the year gone, our current level of access is far worse than it was this time last year.

Mr. President,

We need the support of all Council Members and the Members of the International Syria Support Group Humanitarian Task Force to do their part: to exert their individual and collective influence over the parties.

Mr. President,

The Government of Syria and others a few days ago asked for more UN help with humanitarian aid in eastern Ghouta.

In response, we have, first, proposed, a team of United Nations emergency response experts be deployed to strengthen efforts on the ground. Visa requests for the team have been submitted.

Second, we have confirmed a new allocation of \$20 million from the Syria Humanitarian Fund, managed by my office, for eastern Ghouta and those displaced from Afrin to provide shelter materials, improve sanitation for displaced people,



Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

ensure safe water is available, provide life-saving medicines and medical services, and put in place measures to enhance protection in relocation sites.

Mr. President,

The UN and partners, on average, reach 7.5 million people every month with life-saving humanitarian assistance across the whole of Syria. Clearly without this assistance the situation would be even more catastrophic than it is now, and the loss of life even greater.

Mr. President,

The UN has no money of its own to do these things. We can only do these things because we receive voluntary contributions from our donors. I want to take this opportunity to thank everyone who has supported our appeal over the last year, including our top donors: The United States, Germany, the United Kingdom, the European Union, Norway, Canada, Japan, Denmark, Sweden, Qatar, Kuwait and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Mr. President,

Resolution 2401 was adopted just over a month ago.

I ask you all to make the resolution a reality for the people of Syria.

Whatever the difficulty, the United Nations and its partners, remain determined to follow through, for the sake of the Syrian people.

Thank you, Mr. President.