



OFFICE OF THE DEPUTY REGIONAL HUMANITARIAN COORDINATOR FOR THE SYRIA CRISIS

**Statement by Mark Cutts, Deputy Regional Humanitarian Coordinator for the Syria Crisis  
on the Deteriorating Situation in Idleb**

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I am alarmed at the deteriorating humanitarian situation in Idleb, northwest Syria, where over three million civilians remain trapped in a war zone – the vast majority of them women and children.

At least 300,000 civilians have fled their homes in southern Idleb since mid-December, following a sharp escalation in hostilities. All this is happening in bitter winter temperatures, which pose further risks to people who fled with little more than the clothes on their backs. Many of the displaced are now living in tents and makeshift shelters in inhospitable places, exposed to the elements.

This latest wave of displacement compounds an already dire situation in Idleb – a densely populated governorate already hosting displaced people from all over Syria. An additional 400,000 people in southern Idleb were displaced and at least 1,300 civilians were killed by airstrikes and shelling between May and August last year. This brings the total number of people displaced by fighting in Idleb in the last eight months to over 700,000.

Every day we receive more disturbing reports of families caught up in the violence, seeking refuge and access to essential services in overcrowded camps and urban areas. Many are now sheltering in schools, mosques and other public buildings. Critical shortages of food, shelter, health and winterization assistance, as well as other basic services required for survival, are being reported across Idleb.

Humanitarian organizations are struggling to cope with the increased needs. At least 13 health facilities in Idleb have recently been forced to suspend their operations due to the security situation, exacerbating the suffering of the local population and heightening levels of vulnerability.

On Sunday, we received reports of at least nine civilians killed and 20 others injured in Ariha, following airstrikes in the area. According to humanitarian staff on the ground, the airstrikes resulted in destruction and damage to buildings, including a school, a kindergarten and a mosque.

This is but one example of the daily nightmare being faced by the civilian population of Idleb. This incident follows a string of similar and equally disturbing incidents in the last few weeks. Airstrikes and shelling are now taking place in many towns and villages on a near daily basis.

The United Nations continues to call on all parties to the conflict to take all necessary measures to ensure that civilians are protected, in accordance with international humanitarian law. The United Nations also reiterates the call of the Secretary-General at the end of December for an immediate cessation of hostilities. The Secretary-General has stated that the only credible solution to the Syrian conflict is a UN-facilitated political process pursuant to Security Council resolution 2254 (2015).