Statement by Panos Moumtzis, Regional Humanitarian Coordinator for the Syria Crisis, on Implementation of UN Resolution 2401

Amman, 4 March 2018

I remain deeply concerned for the safety and protection of millions of civilians across Syria, one week after the UN Security Council voted in favour of Resolution 2401, calling for a one-month cessation of hostilities across the war-ravaged country.

Not only has this not happened, in some cases the violence has escalated, particularly for the close to 400,000 men, women and children of East Ghouta. Instead of a much needed reprieve, we continue to see more fighting, more death, and more disturbing reports of hunger and hospitals being bombed. This collective punishment of civilians is simply unacceptable.

Since 18 February, close to 600 people have reportedly been killed in air and ground-based strikes on the besieged enclave, while over 2,000 people have been injured. At the same time, ground-based strikes and mortar shelling from eastern Ghouta have killed and injured scores of civilians in neighbouring Damascus.

To the north in Idleb, fighting continues to kill and injure civilians, destroy civilian infrastructure, and result in large population movements. Since December, some 385,000 people have been displaced, many of them multiple times. Thousands of ordinary Syrians, many with just the clothes on their backs, now live in make-shift camps or out in the open, while formal camps remain overwhelmed.

At the same time, we continue to receive disturbing reports out of Afrin of civilian deaths and injuries, and restrictions on civilian movement as a result of ongoing military operations. Those who risk moving continue to be stopped at exit points by local authorities in Afrin, preventing them from accessing safer areas. To date, an estimated 5,000 people have reached surrounding villages and Aleppo city, while tens of thousands more are now believed to be displaced within Afrin.

Finally, I remain deeply concerned about tens of thousands of people stranded in Rukban in south-eastern Syria. We continue to seek the necessary agreements for convoys of life-saving assistance to them.

The UN and humanitarian partners stand ready to assist the 13.1 million of people in need inside Syria, but cannot do it alone. We certainly cannot do this while the fighting continues.

I continue to call on all parties to the conflict to facilitate unconditional, unimpeded, and sustained access to all people in need throughout the country, particularly for the close to 3 million people in hard-to-reach and besieged areas, and to take all measures to protect civilians and civilian infrastructure, including schools and medical facilities, as well as allow for the urgent medical evacuation of those in need, as required by international humanitarian law and international human rights law.

Last Saturday, the UN Security Council voted unanimously in favour of Resolution 2401 and an end to the human suffering of the Syrian people. It cannot be ignored. It was a call for action. I reiterate that call today. After close to seven years of conflict, we must not fail the Syrian people. We must act now to save lives.