Statement by Panos Moumtzis, Regional Humanitarian Coordinator for the Syria Crisis on Civilians and Humanitarian Workers Being Killed and Ongoing Suffering

Gaziantep, 21 June 2019

I am shocked and appalled by reports of an incident yesterday in which a female patient and three paramedic staff were killed when the ambulance they were travelling in to Maarat Al-Numan main hospital, in Idleb, was hit by a strike. I offer my sincere condolences to the families, loved ones and colleagues of these victims. Hundreds of civilians have been killed and thousands injured in the last few weeks.

Since 1 May, there has been an escalation in hostilities in southern Idlib and surrounding areas that has led to more than 320,000 people being displaced from the southern part of the de-escalation area. An emergency humanitarian response has been activated in response to people’s emergency needs and is ongoing 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. The de-escalation area, which includes Idleb, hosts over three million people, over half of whom are already displaced.

I am outraged by the ongoing violence affecting civilians in Idleb. There are daily reports of children, women, and men being killed, injured and displaced as a result of this violence. Parties to conflict have an obligation to protect civilians and to respect the principles of distinction and proportionality enshrined in International Humanitarian Law.

I pay full tribute and respect to the humanitarian workers in Syria who risk their lives daily to assist millions of people made vulnerable by conflict. Aid workers providing humanitarian assistance and professionals providing basic life-saving services have been subjected to violence throughout the eight years of conflict in Syria. At least 37 schools and 26 healthcare facilities have been damaged or destroyed as a result of airstrikes and shelling in the last two months alone. Two of the health facilities hit were in Government of Syria controlled areas.

Such acts of violence against civilians, humanitarian workers and civilian infrastructure are deplorable and I condemn them in the strongest terms. International humanitarian law must be upheld by all parties and attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure need to stop and they need to stop immediately.

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