

**UN HUMANITARIAN CHIEF URGES UNRESTRICTED HUMANITARIAN ACCESS
TO HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS TRAPPED IN RURAL DAMASCUS**

(New York, 13 September 2013) Towns and cities are increasingly under siege as the Syria crisis worsens and fighting intensifies. People are unable to leave sealed-off Government or opposition-held areas, sometimes for months on end, and have run short of water, food, power and medicines.

I am extremely worried by reports that more than half a million people remain trapped in Rural Damascus. We are hearing very disturbing reports from the town of Moadamyieh, for example, just a few kilometres from the capital. It is reported that the town has been besieged for the last ten months, suffering daily shelling and armed clashes between Government and opposition groups. UN humanitarian agencies have not been able to deliver supplies for nearly a year, despite repeated attempts, due to security constraints. Most of the 70,000 population of the area has fled but some 12,000 people remain trapped, unable to get enough food for their families. There are cases of severe malnutrition among children, as well as the spread of skin and respiratory diseases.

Civilians continue to be targeted or denied access to food and emergency medical treatment in many places across Syria in this horrendous crisis. I call on all parties to agree a pause in hostilities to allow humanitarian agencies immediate and unhindered access to evacuate the wounded and provide life-saving treatment and supplies in areas where fighting is ongoing. Civilians must be allowed to move to safer areas.

I would remind the Government and other parties to this conflict once again that they have an obligation under international human rights and international humanitarian law to protect civilians and allow neutral, impartial humanitarian organizations safe access to all people in need.

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