

**UNDER-SECRETARY-GENERAL FOR HUMANITARIAN AFFAIRS AND  
EMERGENCY RELIEF COORDINATOR, MARK LOWCOCK  
BRIEFING TO THE SECURITY COUNCIL ON SYRIA**

*New York, 28 February 2018*

*As delivered*

Thank you, Mr. President

We have received a lot of questions about resolution 2401, which you passed on Saturday, and its demand for a cessation of hostilities, without delay, for at least 30 consecutive days throughout Syria.

I want to start today by answering the questions we have received.

- Is the United Nations ready to deliver to people who need humanitarian assistance?

Yes. We have convoys ready to go to ten besieged and hard-to-reach locations. They include a 45-truck convoy with aid for 90,000 people to Douma in eastern Ghouta.

- Are you ready to support medical evacuations from eastern Ghouta?

Yes. We are working very closely with the International Committee of the Red Cross, the Syrian Arab Red Crescent and other health partners on that.

- Has Security Council resolution 2401 been implemented? Is there a ceasefire in Syria?

No. And no.

- Have you got any inter-agency cross line convoys through to hard-to-reach or besieged areas? No.

- Have you been given permission to access any of those locations? No.

- Have you received the necessary facilitation letters for convoys? No

- Have there been any medical evacuations. No

- Have any civilians left eastern Ghouta? No.
- Is there any actual improvement in the humanitarian situation in eastern Ghouta since the passage of the resolution, demanding as it did unimpeded access? No.
- Can you deliver assistance in eastern Ghouta during a humanitarian pause between nine am and two pm local time?

Well, to quote the ICRC's Middle East Director who spoke yesterday on this, "it is impossible to bring a humanitarian convoy in 5 hours". Agencies now have years of experience with this and it can take a day simply to pass checkpoints, even when the parties have agreed. Then you need to offload the goods.

- So, if there has been no humanitarian access since the resolution on Saturday, what has happened in the last few days?

More bombing. More fighting. More death. More destruction. More maiming of women and children. More hunger. More misery.  
More, in other words, of the same.

On 26 February, two days ago, airstrikes, barrel bombs and artillery shelling were reported across eastern Ghouta, including in Harasta, Shafuniyeh, Otaya, Hosh Eldawahreh, Al-Ashari, Jobar, Beit Sawa, Hazerma, Hammura, Nashabiyeh, Saqba and Duma. Reports indicate that at least 30 civilians including women and children were killed. In Shafuniyeh, 14 people, including three women and four children, were reportedly killed and many others injured by airstrikes. Eighteen civilians, including drivers of ambulances, women and children, were reportedly received at health facilities in Shafuniyeh with difficulties breathing, consistent with the use of chlorine. One child reportedly died as a result. On the same day, two local NGO workers were reportedly killed as a result of shelling in the besieged enclave. It was also reported that two health facilities in Saqba were taken out-of-service by airstrikes.

Shells have also reportedly continued to fall in Damascus city from eastern Ghouta in the last few days.

Mr. President,

Over 580 people since 18 February are now reported to have been killed due to air and ground-based strikes in eastern Ghouta, with well over 1,000 people injured. At the same time hundreds of rockets from eastern Ghouta into Damascus have reportedly killed 15 people, and injured over 200.

Mr. President,

I want now to update you about the situation in other parts of the country.

In Idleb, fighting continues to kill and injure civilians, destroy civilian infrastructure, and result in large population movements. Since December an estimated 385,000 people have been displaced, with many civilians moving north. Half of Idleb's population was already displaced, and people are being forced to move yet again – with each disruption increasing their vulnerability. Civilians are concentrated in an ever-smaller area. Many are forced to live in make-shift camps or out in the open. Formal camps are overwhelmed – operating at up to 400 percent of their capacity. The response is being stretched to its limits.

Mr. President,

We are receiving reports of civilian deaths and injuries, and restriction on movement for many civilians as a result of military operations in Afrin. Those who risk moving continue to be stopped at exit points by local authorities in Afrin, preventing them from accessing safer areas. So far, around 5,000 people we think have reached surrounding villages and Aleppo city. Tens of thousands are believed to be displaced within Afrin. The Turkish authorities have emphasized to us their willingness to facilitate humanitarian access. We would like to see aid convoys run from Damascus but that has not thus far been agreed on the Syrian side.

In Raqqa city, conditions remain unsafe for the return of displaced people. Among people trying to return home, 637 have been injured and more than 125 killed by unexploded ordinance since last October. Medical and other essential services are absent and access for humanitarian workers to the city remains precariously limited because the conditions are so dangerous. As I have said before, demining activities need to be accelerated as a matter of urgency.

Humanitarian access for the United Nations and its implementing partners in Hasakah was limited for much of January due to increased restrictions placed by local authorities. United Nations convoys were blocked from traveling to the northeast from elsewhere within the country. The delivery of aid already in local warehouses was also blocked. While an agreement was reached on 30 January to resume humanitarian deliveries, that agreement will end in March. NGO partners continue to deliver goods and services across the north-east, but sustainable access for the United Nations is critical. Any protracted interruption of humanitarian assistance and services in the IDP sites may push the displaced people back to areas where they are not safe.

Mr. President,

Earlier this month the United Nations received clearance for the first assessment visit to Deir ez-Zor city after three and a half years of ISIL control. More than 100,000 people live in the town, despite that fact that it estimated to be 80 percent destroyed.

Infrastructure is almost completely destroyed, particularly in the central and the eastern areas where ISIL was in control. The United Nations has dispatched 78 trucks with food, health, nutrition, protection, shelter, education and water and sanitation items since last September when ISIL was pushed out, in coordination with the Syrian Arab Red Crescent.

Finally, we remain 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.

Mr. President

As I told you last week there was a severe reduction – nearly 40% in cross-line access to besieged and hard-to-reach areas in 2017 compared to 2016.

On average in 2017, we reached 165,000 people a month with our cross-line convoys. That was totally inadequate.

But so far, this year we have in total reached just 7,200, through a single small convoy earlier this month.

In other words, we were reaching more than 50 times as many people in besieged and hard-to-reach areas last year as so far, this year.

The main reasons for the reduction in the number of convoys has been the consistent refusal by the Government of Syria to give the necessary approvals and facilitation letters to support delivery.

Mr. President,

So, while we continue, as the Secretary-General's report details, to reach millions of people in urgent need in areas controlled by the Government of Syria, and through the cross-border programmes you mandated in resolution 2393, assistance across conflict lines to millions of people in hard-to-reach and besieged areas has in recent months totally collapsed. Unless this changes, we will soon see even more people dying from starvation and disease than from the bombing and shelling.

The United Nations remains focused on reaching those most in need throughout the country, including the 5.6 million people considered to be in acute need. The needs-based approach means the United Nations will continue to seek to deliver aid and to provide services to millions of people in a principled manner regardless of where they are located. More than half of those in need are in government-controlled areas. But millions more are not.

What the Syrian people need has been made abundantly clear. Protection. Access to basic goods and services. An end to sieges. Respect for international humanitarian law and international human rights law. You have unanimously supported all this in passing resolution 2401.

Mr. President

I started today by answering questions we have received on your resolution. I would like to end with a question for you. When will your resolution be implemented?

Thank you.