

## PRESS RELEASE

### **Syria conflict depriving hundreds of thousands of children of their education**

*School infrastructure severely damaged, attendance rates plummeting, UNICEF assessment shows*

**AMMAN/DAMASCUS, 5 March 2013** – Almost two years into the Syria crisis, the escalating level of violence is threatening the education of hundreds of thousands of children, a UNICEF assessment says.

One fifth of the country's schools have suffered direct physical damage or are being used to shelter displaced persons.

In cities where the conflict has been most intense, some children have already missed out on almost two years of schooling.

"The education system in Syria is reeling from the impact of violence," said Youssouf Abdel-Jelil, UNICEF Syria Representative. "Syria once prided itself on the quality of its schools. Now it's seeing the gains it made over the years rapidly reversed."

UNICEF's education assessment – conducted in December 2012 – notes that many parents are now reluctant to send their children to school, fearing for their safety.

Among other findings in the assessment:

- At least 2,400 schools have been damaged or destroyed, including 772 in Idlib (50 per cent of the total), 300 in Aleppo and another 300 in Deraa;
- Over 1,500 schools are being used as shelters for displaced persons;
- More than 110 teachers and other staff have been killed and many others are no longer reporting for work. In Idlib, for example, teacher attendance is no more than 55 per cent;
- In Aleppo, children attendance rate has dropped to as low as 6 per cent; and
- Some schools have been used by armed forces and groups involved in the conflict.

The assessment says schools in Idlib, Aleppo and Deraa – where fighting has been particularly severe – are among the worst affected. As a result, schoolchildren are often failing to turn up for class, sometimes attending only twice a week.

In areas hosting high numbers of displaced families, classes are overcrowded, sometimes hosting up to 100 students.

"Being in school makes children feel safe and protected and leaves parents hopeful about their children's future", said Mr. Abdel-Jelil. "That's why so many parents we talk to single out education as their top priority."

Working to address children's learning needs inside Syria, UNICEF is supporting more than 170 school clubs in Homs, Deraa, Rural Damascus, Tartous, Lattakia, Hama and Quneitra. The clubs allow some 40,000 children to receive much needed remedial education and take part in recreational activities. UNICEF is also providing teaching and learning supplies and is rehabilitating damaged schools.

However, an additional US\$1 million is needed to keep the clubs open until the end of May. Funding shortfalls are also preventing the provision of urgently-needed pre-fabricated classrooms, repairs and rehabilitation of learning spaces, and the provision of teaching and learning materials.

Overall, UNICEF needs US\$20 million for its education programmes in Syria during the first six months of the current year, of which it has received no more than \$3 million.

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**Note to editors:** *UNICEF Syria's priorities in education include providing 1 million children with school materials; increasing access to education for 150,000 children, particularly among the internally displaced; providing 300,000 children with emotional support, and providing pre-fabricated classrooms to increase attendance and support the resumption of educational activities.*

#### **About UNICEF**

UNICEF works in more than 190 countries and territories to help children survive and thrive, from early childhood through adolescence. The world's largest provider of vaccines for developing countries, UNICEF supports child health and nutrition, good water and sanitation, quality basic education for all boys and girls, and the protection of children from violence, exploitation, and AIDS. UNICEF is funded entirely by the voluntary contributions of individuals, businesses, foundations and governments. For more information about UNICEF and its work visit: <http://www.unicef.org>

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