UNITED NATIONS AND SYRIAN ARAB RED CRESCENT COMPLETE DELIVERY OF ASSISTANCE TO RUKBAN

DAMASCUS, 15 February 2019

The United Nations and the Syrian Arab Red Crescent (SARC) yesterday completed the delivery of much-needed humanitarian assistance to more than 40,000 displaced people at the remote Rukban ‘makeshift’ settlement in south-eastern Syria, on the border with Jordan.

This is only the second time that the UN has been able to reach the remote site from within Syria, where the cold winter months have exacerbated an already dire situation.

“This UN and Syrian Arab Red Crescent inter-agency convoy has provided life-saving assistance to people at Rukban, many of whom are women and children who have been stranded in the desert in extremely harsh conditions for years, and allowed us to listen to their needs and wishes for the future,” said Mr. Sajjad Malik, the UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator a.i. in Syria.

“People have been telling our teams how desperate their situation is; they are cold, hungry and lack access to the most basic services, even water is scarce. What limited commodities are available are too expensive for most to afford. Women and girls face serious protection risks such as early marriage and sexual abuse,” said Mr. Malik.

The majority of the displaced in Rukban are women and children. “We came here to get vaccinated, we hope the aid won’t stop,” said Nour, 15. “Outside there is only mud and dust, there is no food”, Abdallah, 11, said.

The UN and SARC teams distributed a one-month food ration to over 8,300 families, along with shelter materials and core relief items, including blankets, sleeping mats and water containers. Some 10,000 dignity kits were distributed to women and girls, while critical nutritional supplies were provided to young children.

Essential medicine and equipment were provided, and thousands of children were vaccinated. The lack of access to education is a key concern at Rukban, so the UN also ensured that education supplies covering the needs of 8,000 children as well as recreational materials to children were part of the convoy.

Comprehensive distribution oversight and monitoring took place by UN and SARC teams to ensure assistance reached civilians in need. In addition, the teams carried out needs assessments and an intention survey, which close to 2,900 households took part in, and which will inform discussions on finding a durable solution.

“While the completion of this convoy is an important achievement -- and I would like to thank all the involved stakeholders -- it is clear that much more is needed. The people at Rukban need a long-term solution, allowing them to return to their homes or a place of their choosing in safety
and dignity. In the meantime, we need sustained access to provide ongoing assistance, and immediate steps need to be taken to improve people’s access to medical treatment, including reproductive healthcare,” stressed Mr. Malik.

“While in Rukban, we gave the people there a voice and we showed the world how they live and survive in those treacherous conditions. The challenge now is to work towards improving their situation and finding solutions to their plight. Rukban is not a place for people, mostly women and children, to live. There are many challenges ahead of us,” said the UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator a.i.

The complex, large-scale aid operation is the biggest ever carried out by the UN in Syria. The mission lasted nine days, consisting of 133 trucks; 118 loaded with relief supplies and 15 carrying logistics supplies, with more than 300 staff, volunteers and commercial suppliers taking part. It took more than two months of advocacy and negotiations with all parties to ensure safe access to the site.

The United Nations continues to call on all parties to ensure safe and sustained access to people in need at Rukban and to people in need elsewhere in the country.

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