

**UNDER-SECRETARY-GENERAL FOR HUMANITARIAN AFFAIRS AND
EMERGENCY RELIEF COORDINATOR, MARTIN GRIFFITHS**

Briefing to the Security Council on the humanitarian situation in Syria

New York, 27 October 2021

As delivered

Thank you very much, Mr. President.

Mr. President,

As you hear every month, and as we just heard from Geir [Pedersen, Special Envoy for Syria], the humanitarian crisis in the Syrian Arab Republic continues to worsen. And each month, accordingly, you hear the Emergency Relief Coordinator – that’s me – say this, and yet without a change of course, each month this will remain true. And as my role is to bear witness in this Council to the suffering of the Syrian people, so, Mr. President, I hope you will bear with me.

Ten years into the conflict, life remains very difficult for millions of Syrians, as we have just been hearing from Geir. It is increasingly more difficult for many of them.

Violence continues to kill and injure civilians, including women and children.

Attacks and security incidents increased throughout Syria this month. Only last week, an attack in Ariha, Idlib Governorate, reportedly killed 11 civilians and injured over 30, including schoolchildren. A market supported by a UN project was also damaged.

All parties to the conflict – again, as Geir has said – must respect civilians and civilian infrastructure, as is required by international humanitarian law, and make all effort to spare them the consequences of conflict.

Mr. President,

Daily life in Syria is becoming less and less affordable. Over ninety per cent of the population now lives below the poverty line.

Many people are forced to make very difficult choices to make ends meet, and thus face greater risk of exploitation.

This means that an expansion of early recovery programmes must be central in our efforts to address needs in a sustainable way. Progress has been made. Along with other mechanisms, our pooled funds have increased support to early recovery activities. But much, much, much more is needed.

I will continue, for my part, to urge donors, agencies and implementing partners to enable communities to access basic social services and to rebuild dignified lives.

Mr. President,

On top of increasing poverty, the water crisis and worsening food security, people in Syria are also facing a resurgence of COVID-19. Cases are surging, ICUs are at full capacity, and vaccination rates remain below 2 per cent – 2 per cent, Mr. President.

And now, exhausted by years of conflict, poverty and the pandemic, Syrians are about to face another bitter winter.

As temperatures start to drop, rain, cold and winter conditions will compound hardship for millions of people.

Close to 2 million people in the north-west, for example, mostly women and children, live in camps, often in overcrowded and flimsy shelters, in valleys that flood, or on rocky hillsides exposed to the elements. And they have lived there for some time, in these temporary arrangements.

Although the United Nations and its humanitarian partners are doing everything possible to assist the most vulnerable, significant funding gaps remain.

Mr. President,

The UN and its partners continue to make every effort, as required by this Council, to scale up assistance.

When I was in Aleppo last August, I was there when the World Food Programme's cross-line delivery of food aid reached Idleb Governorate. This was a vital step towards expanding the humanitarian response, but we must now ensure that that aid is distributed. And as I speak, full agreement from the parties remains pending, and I would urge swift movement to those involved in such agreement on next steps.

Preparations are also under way for another World Food Programme cross-line delivery in November.

And beyond this, the United Nations has developed a plan for a series of regular and predictable inter-agency cross-line operations to deliver multisectoral assistance in the coming six months, and to complement the assistance coming across the border.

We have already submitted the request for the first inter-agency convoy under the six-month plan to the Government of Syria. The support of both the Syrian and Turkish Governments and relevant parties in north-west Syria for the plan will also be critical.

I'm quietly optimistic that we will be able to further expand cross-line access over the coming months. And you can be sure that we will certainly do our part.

I urge, therefore, all concerned parties to ensure that cross-line missions and the aid distributions associated with them proceed without delays. If cross-line operations are to be a sustainable way of reaching more people, then we need agreement on a suitable distribution modality that is acceptable to all the relevant parties. And security guarantees from parties on the ground.

Mr. President, this is a complicated matter. It takes time, but it has all our efforts.

Mr. President,

When it comes to delivering life-saving aid, all channels should be made, and kept, available.

And thus, as I mentioned earlier, cross-border assistance remains the central part of the humanitarian response to ensure aid effectively and transparently reaches millions of people in need in north-west Syria.

Mr. President,

Constructive discussions with the Syrian authorities have shown that previous mission approval rates have been misrepresented, including in at least one previous report of the Secretary-General. And I apologize for this, and I assure you that through our cooperation with the Government, we'll make every effort to prevent this in the future.

So, Mr. President, to sum up:

Communities are determined to restart their lives, yet still face so many difficulties. What is needed is this:

We need an urgent injection of life-saving aid, especially as Syrians prepare for winter.

We need more aid to early recovery and livelihoods. Syrians want to be able to support themselves, with dignity.

And we need to expand access to basic social services. Syrians, like all of us, want to send their children to school, to have electricity and water, and a reliable health clinic. That is the least that we can help them to achieve.

And, of course, perhaps most importantly, Syrians need peace and the support and the efforts of the Special Envoy.

Thank you, Mr. President.