Fighting continues to escalate despite the UN call for a cease fire.

The Syrian opposition met on 26 MAR 2012, in Istanbul in an effort to form a unified voice ahead of the next week's Friends of Syria conference.

AS OF 1600 HRS EDT
26 March 2012
BACKGROUND

THE ARAB SPRING MOVEMENT

• Syria was not immune to the pro-democracy Arab Spring movements. Anti-government protests erupted in the southern governorate of Daraa in mid-March 2011 and quickly spread to other parts of the country.

• For nearly a year, security forces have responded, killing at least civilian protesters and detaining thousands, including children under age 18.

• In response to the protest movement, the Syrian government enacted several reforms, such as lifting the state of emergency that had been in place since 1963, introducing a new media law, and granting citizenship to stateless Kurds. However, armed action has continued on both sides.

NOVEMBER 2011 TO PRESENT

• Since Nov 2011, the government’s use of armed forces against opposition groups has been characterized as “collective punishment” of civilians. With both pro- and anti-government groups engaging in violence, there is concern that the situation will escalate into a full-blown civil war.

• The widespread violence and deteriorating socio-economic conditions have left many communities with difficulties in meeting basic needs.

THE OPPOSITION

• One of the main opposition groups, the Syrian National Council (SNC), is an umbrella organization that was formed by activists in Istanbul on 24 August. The SNC called for the Syrian government to be overthrown by a united opposition, rejected dialogue with President Assad, and, though officially against military intervention, requested international protection of the civilian population.

• Another main group, the National Co-ordination Committee (NCC) advocated for dialogue with the government, believing that toppling the Assad regime would lead to further chaos.

• On 31 Dec 2011, these two groups signed an agreement to unite against the government.

THE FREE SYRIAN ARMY

• In late 2011, civilians and army defectors formed fighting units, which began an insurgency campaign against the Syrian Army. The insurgents unified under the banner of the Free Syrian Army and have fought in an increasingly organized fashion; however, the civilian component of the armed opposition lacked an organized leadership.

• The uprising has sectarian undertones, though neither faction has described sectarianism as playing a major role. The opposition is dominated by Sunni Muslims, whereas the leading government figures are Alawite Muslims.

• Western and Arab governments have considered options for response, including more aggressive diplomacy, providing arms to the rebels, or direct military intervention. These discussions have been encumbered by a lack of cohesion among the Syrian opposition, and allegations that foreign-based or terrorist-group-affiliated fighters are joining participating in the conflict.

SOURCES:
WORLD NEWS: SYRIAN REBELS FORM NATIONAL COUNCIL, 24 AUG 2011
BBC: GUIDE TO THE SYRIAN OPPOSITION, 1 MAR 2011
AL JAZEERA: ARAB MISSION WARNS SYRIA AS OPPOSITION UNITES, 01 JAN 2012
PBS: INSIDE THE FREE SYRIAN ARMY, 12 MARCH 2012
NYTIMES: SYRIA EXPANDS ASSAULT, HITTING REBEL FORCES IN CITY IN NORTH, 13 MAR 2012

Anwar Amro/Agence France-Presse — Getty Images
SITUATION

OVERVIEW

Heavy violence continues in Syria while diplomatic pressure mounts against both the government and opposition. Health indicators are worsening, refugee counts increases, but some relief efforts were successful.

DIPLOMATIC FRONT

• UN Security Council officials unanimously issued a presidential statement on 21 MAR 2012, expressing its full support for the efforts of the Joint Special Envoy of the UN and the League of Arab States for Syria to help end the crisis.

• Calls from the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, the Arab League and the UN Special Envoy to Syria have been calling for a "cease fire." Syrian authorities are unable to halt the use of force and violence.

• UN-Arab League special envoy Kofi Annan met with President Dmitry Medvedev and Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov on 25 MAR. Annan will begin talks in China on 27 MAR. Annan is carrying the Assad’s answer to a peace plan under which Syria could begin a "political transition" to a representative government,

• The European Union (EU) introduced 13 sets of restrictive measures to increase pressure on the government of President Bashar al-Assad, and has consistently called for Assad to step aside to make way for a peaceful transition.

• Assad’s family had its assets frozen and are banned from traveling in EU.

• The U.S. and other key allies are considering providing Syrian rebels with communications help, medical aid and other "non-lethal" assistance. President Barack Obama discussed the potential aid options on 25 MAR in a lengthy private meeting with Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

HUMANITARIAN FRONT

• On 23 MAR 2012, the UN Human Rights Council extended the mandate of the Commission of Inquiry and requested for continuous updates of human rights violations, assessment of casualty figures, and to publish it periodically. China, Russia, and Cuba opposed the resolution.

• The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and Syrian Arab Red Crescent (SARC) team have been able to visit areas affected by the fighting such as Homs, Idlib, Hama, and Dara’a. Nearly 9,000 people have received aid (food, blankets, and mattresses) in Homs and Idlib provinces. (IMPACT ON AID)

HUMANITARIAN AND NEEDS ASSESSMENT – INSIDE SYRIA

• WHO is currently participating in an inter-agency mission with the UN to conduct a rapid assessment and establish humanitarian needs in 8 governorates in Syria (Homs, Hama, Tartous, Lattakia, Aleppo, Der Al Zoor, Rural Damascus and Dara’a). The UN agencies represented are UNICEF, WFP, FAO, UNFPA, UNDP and OCHA.

• Pending on the results of the abovementioned interagency assessment, WHO and United Nations Populations Fund (UNFPA) will be conducting a needs assessment survey of health facilities, hospitals and primary health care units. The survey will initially cover the four governorates of Darea, Rural Damascus, Homs, and Der Al Zoor. More governorates will be assessed at a later stage.

SOURCES:
AP: US TO PURSUE NON-LETHAL AID FOR REBELS
RELIEFWEB: WORSENING HUMAN RIGHTS CONDITIONS, 23 MAR 2012
COUNCIL ON FOREIGN RELATIONS: MIDDLE EAST MATTERS, MAR 2012
ICRC: SITUATION IN SYRIA LATEST UPDATE, 23 MAR 2012
VOA: SECURITY COUNCIL BACKS ENVOY’S PEACE PLAN, 21 MAR 2012
THE GUARDIAN: ASSAD FAMILY BLACKLISTED BY EU, 23 MAR 2012
EU FACTSHEET, 23 MAR 2012
ITAR-TASS: DMITRY MEDVEDEV AND KOFI ANNAN DISCUSS HUMANITARIAN SITUATION IN SYRIA, 25 MAR 2012
SITUATION

IDENTIFIED NEEDS AND HEALTH ISSUES

• Joint team assessment on 14 MAR 2012 from the ICRC and SARC in the affected areas identified need for mattresses, blankets, food, baby formula, basic medicines, and medication for chronic illnesses.

• Medical services are significantly hindered due to violations of medical neutrality. Underground health care services have been reported and Syrians are leaving the country to seek health care in neighboring countries.

• Vaccination coverage rate has decreased dramatically in affected areas.

• Pharmaceutical companies’ may not be able to sustain the cost of urgently needed drugs and medication.

A new trend is being seen among the refugees escaping from Syria. Less interviewees are saying they were victims of excessive use of force during the quelling of protests and more are testifying they fled army attacks on entire villages. As a result, large neighborhood groups are now making the difficult trip across the closed borders, as opposed to the individuals and families that were the rule before. (Commission of Inquiry on Syria)

SYRIAN REFUGEES (SEE POPULATION DISPLACEMENT)

• During 16-23 MAR 2012, The UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) estimates that Syrian refugees has risen by 5,000 and now stands at about 39,000.

• UN inquiry commission on rights and abuses in Syria released new report on 23 MAR 2012, entire clans and villages are fleeing Syria in groups. Report is based on extensive interviews with more than 400 refugees. The commission is still not allowed to enter the country.

• LEBANON: 7,913 Syrians are currently registered with UNHCR and the High Relief Commission (HRC).

• TURKEY: About 17,000 Syrian refugees are registered and now live in tent camps and a container city. Turkey's prime minister has warned Damascus that they are considering creating a buffer zone in Syria to stem the stream of Syrian refugees fleeing over the border.

• JORDAN: More than 6,000 Syrians have registered with UNHCR in Jordan since Mar 2011, with a further 2,500 awaiting registration.

• IRAQ: The number Syrian refugees are growing, exact numbers are still being assessed.

Syrian refugee population

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Current planning figure for 6 months</th>
<th>Contingency planning figure*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jordan</td>
<td>20,000</td>
<td>50,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lebanon</td>
<td>25,000</td>
<td>50,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iraq</td>
<td>1,500</td>
<td>5,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Turkey</td>
<td>50,000</td>
<td>100,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>96,500</td>
<td>205,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

UNHCR Syria Regional Response Plan

Syrian refugees walk through woods helped by rebels from the Free Syrian Army as they attempt to cross the northwestern part of the Syrian border with neighboring Turkey (SOURCE: AFP)
This map presents a situational update of reported protests and violent clashes in cities and towns across the Syrian Arab Republic as reported between 12 and 18 March 2012, related to the flare-up of violence and the presence of Arab League observers.

Also depicted are the cumulative numbers of reported deaths since March 2011 aggregated by Governorate, and Syrian refugee camps that have been opened along the border in Turkey and Lebanon.

The spatial distribution of the dominant ethnic/religious communities in the country have been included as background context to the larger social and political uprising occurring within the country.

Event locations and figures presented in this map are based exclusively on a number of open reporting sources since the beginning of the uprising in March 2011 and have not been verified on the ground. It is possible that not all incident locations have been depicted. Please send feedback to UNITAR/UNOSAT.

http://www.unitar.org/unosat/node/44/1650
NUMBER OF DEATHS FROM THE CONFLICT

NUMBER OF DEATHS REPORTED BY GOVERNORATES
(18 MAR 2011 – 19 MAR 2012)

NUMBER OF DEATHS REPORTED AS MALE, FEMALE AND CHILDREN (18 MAR 2011 – 19 MAR 2012)

TO DATE 963 CHILDREN (0-18) HAVE DIED IN THE CONFLICT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AGES</th>
<th>NUMBERS OF DEATH</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-5</td>
<td>122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-12</td>
<td>431</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13-18</td>
<td>431</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NOTES: The VDC website, in previous situation maps used as source for Number of Deaths by Governorates and by Male, Female and Children, is temporarily closed due to high traffic. In this UNOSTAT’S Situation Map (Update 10) VDC was replaced as source for Number of Deaths by Governorates and by Male, Female and Children with data from Syrianshuhada. Because of uneven reporting standards and frequencies of humanitarian and political agencies monitoring the conflict in Syria, there are notable variations between the number of reported deaths by governorate and the reported cumulative death toll for the country, which can vary as much as ten percent.

TOTAL NUMBER OF DEATHS REPORTED PER DAY (18 MAR 2011 – 19 MAR 2012)

http://www.unitar.org/unosat/node/44/1650

www.Syrianshuhada.com
MEDICAL SERVICES

- In OCT 2011, Amnesty International published a report detailing how hospital facilities are becoming places of torture for wounded individuals and that healthcare workers are being targeted by government forces.

- Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) in FEB 2012 released evidence in a dossier of testimonies from wounded patients treated outside the country and doctors inside Syria taken between 30 JAN and 6 FEB 2012. The testimonies describe:
  - Heavy presence of government forces inside hospitals.
  - Injured detainees being denied access to medical care.
  - Severe delays in treatment, and lack of basic medical supplies.
  - Reports of torture and possible execution of injured protesters inside hospitals.

- Syrian Network for Human Rights reported the situation in Homs:
  - Hundreds of severely wounded civilians are not able to use the hospitals.
  - Medical personnel lack medication, anesthesia, surgical equipment, and in some cases, water and power to perform surgery.
  - Doctors are being detained for working in field hospitals or helping bring medical supplies to the wounded.
  - Possession of drugs and basic medical materials, such as gauze, is currently considered a crime of complicity with the rebellion.

- Syrian refugees are seeking medical treatment in Lebanon, Turkey, and Jordan.

- 20 MAR 2012, WHO reported concerns regarding decreased availability of medications in the country, due to currency fluctuations, Central Bank sanctions, and increased costs related to operations.

HEALTHCARE WORKERS

- Healthcare employees at private hospitals are being watched by government forces because they have started to provide patients with false diagnosis in order to treat them for wounds sustained during clashes so they do not have to report them to the government.

- Medical practitioners are reporting inability to attend to protesters, due to lack of proper medical supplies, and multiple violations of medical neutrality including torture and murder of protesters in hospitals, and lack of able care providers, due to intimidation and arrest of physicians providing care.

PUBLIC HEALTH RISK FACTORS:

- Residents living in conflict areas do not have adequate supplies of water, sanitation, food, or medicine.

- Cold weather and a deteriorating economic situation are making it even harder for people to cope.

- The WHO reports a significant decrease in vaccination coverage due to lack of access to medications and care for families with children under age 5 and for healthcare workers.

MENTAL HEALTH

- Children are especially affected by stress and violence related to the conflict. UNICEF has partnered with Jordan Hashemite Fund for Human Development to provide children with psychosocial support and recreational activities in a safe environment.

- MSF in conjunction with the Makassed Public Health center in Lebanon implemented a mental health care program for Syrian refugees, providing a psychologist and a psychiatrist to provide counseling.

SOURCES:
- AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL: SYRIAN GOVERNMENT TARGETS WOUNDED AND HEALTH WORKERS, SEPT 2012
- VOA: SYRIAN DOCTORS ACCUSE GOVERNMENT OF WAR CRIMES, 16 FEB 2012
- MSF: SYRIA: MEDICINE AS A WEAPON OF PERSECUTION
- THE LANCET: SYRIA’S HEALTH AND HUMANITARIAN CRISIS, 18 FEB 2012
- BBC NEWS: SITUATION IN SYRIA, 19 MAR 2012
- WHO: HIGHLIGHTS SYRIAN ARAB REPUBLIC, 20 MAR 2012
- BBC: SYRIAN SURGEON, 17 MAR 2012
- UNICEF: SERVICES TO HELP REFUGEE CHILDREN RECOVER FROM CONFLICT IN SYRIA 8 MARCH 2012
- UNHCR: LEBANON UPDATE: SUPPORT TO DISPLACED SYRIANS

A Syrian refugee in a hospital bed in Turkey. (PHOTO: Moises Saman / NYTimes)
CURRENT NEEDS ASSESSMENT

- Although it has been difficult to obtain independent evaluations, stakeholders – including the Ministry of Health, local NGOs and the Syrian Arab Red Crescent (SARC) – agree that there is acute need for:
  - Restoring trauma management capacity and referral systems in the affected areas, including ambulance transport capacity.
  - Addressing the lack of medicines and supplies, especially in relation to trauma care and chronic diseases.
  - Ensuring the ongoing provision of basic health services, with particular emphasis on child health, maternal health, and chronic disease care.
  - Strengthening health workforce in specific areas with mobile clinics and fixed health posts.

- The joint mission has determined from discussion with those in the affected areas that the most critical needs are for food, medicine, blankets, mattresses and other household items. While some immediate relief has been provided by the UN through the joint mission, further assessment is necessary to finalize response plan.

PLANNED INDEPENDENT ASSESSMENTS

- On 18 MAR 2012, a joint humanitarian mission including staff from the UN and OIC joined with the Syrian government and SARC representatives to perform a humanitarian needs assessment mission.

- As of 22 MAR, 2012, this joint mission has visited Homs, Hama, Tartous, Idlib, Lattakia and Aleppo, and plans to continue the mission.

DEPLOYMENT OF AID

- So far, ICRC is the only international organization to bring aid into Syria. The SARC Idlib branch clinic was the only medical facility functioning in the town center of Idlib.

- 19-23 MAR 2012, The ICRC and Syrian Arab Red Crescent (SARC) were granted wider access to areas such as Idlib, Homs, Hama, Dara’a, and the surrounding villages of Binnish and Fo’a. This was the first time aid reached those villages.

- Details of delivery of food, medicines and other essential items:
  - Homs and Idlib – 9,000 people have received aid.
  - Homs – 1,800 food parcels, 1,200 mattresses, 1,200 blankets, 600 hygiene kits.
  - Idlib – 2,000 food parcels to 6,000 persons ad residents.
  - Aleppo- 1,500 food parcels were distributed to people in the city and surrounding rural areas. Over 350 people who recently came from Homs and Idlib received aid.
  - Along Turkey border (Manbij, Al-Bab, Maskanah, and in Jarablus and Ayn Arab): 3,000 people have now received aid.

- More distributions were planned for 24 MAR

UN APPEAL FOR REFUGEE AID

- During the Palais des Nations press briefing in Geneva on 23 MAR 2012, the UN and its humanitarian partners issued an appeal for US$84 million to help Syrian refugees in Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey, and Iraq.

- The plan is based on a expectation of continued increase in refugees to 100,000 people for the next 6-months and a contingency capacity of 200,000 people.

- The plan does not cover humanitarian needs inside Syria, which is expected to be covered by an appeal by OCHA in the near future.

SOURCES:
- THE LANCET: SYRIA'S HEALTH AND HUMANITARIAN CRISIS, 18 FEB 12
- RELIEFWEB: EMERGENCY RELIEF COORDINATOR'S KEY MESSAGES ON SYRIA 22 MAR 12
- RELIEFWEB: MORE AID REACHES HOMS, ALEPPO AND IDLIB, 23 MAR 12
- ICRC: SITREP, 14 MAR 12

Idlib, Syria. Staff distribute food parcels in front of the SARC warehouse. PHOTO: ICRC
VIOLATIONS OF MEDICAL NEUTRALITY

• Widespread violations of medical neutrality have been reported from within Syria and by neutral observers. Government forces have invaded, attacked, and misused hospitals and medical transports, preventing civilians from receiving health care.

• People wounded in protests or other incidents related to the uprising have been verbally abused and physically assaulted in state run hospitals, including by medical staff, and in some cases denied medical care. Many of those taken to hospitals have been detained.

• In Homs, one of Syria’s major cities and governorates, government security forces have obstructed ambulances on their way to pick up wounded people and when ferrying the wounded to hospital, threatened Syrian Arab Red Crescent (SARC) workers with violence or detention, and interrogated wounded patients while they were being transported in ambulances.

• Health care workers who encounter people wounded in the unrest face the dilemma of whether to obey the government’s instructions and report patients to the authorities – knowing that this may lead to the patients’ arrest, detention, and possible torture – or to ignore or disobey those instructions, and expose themselves to reprisals.

• An estimated 250 doctors have been detained and tortured for treating wounded civilians.

• An investigation by Physicians for Human Rights (PHR) revealed that these circumstances have led to the rise of an underground health network:
  – Many people are now reportedly avoiding state-run hospitals if they or their relatives have been wounded during the protests and unrest.
  – They are turning to private hospitals, or to makeshift field hospitals that have been set up by some communities to treat the wounded.
  – However, these hospitals face problems in obtaining adequate medical supplies, including blood for use in transfusions, which can only be obtained from the Central Blood Bank controlled by the Ministry of Defense.

SOURCES:
AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL: SYRIAN GOVERNMENT TARGETS WOUNDED AND HEALTH WORKERS, OCT 2011
PHR: SYRIA: ATTACKS ON DOCTORS, PATIENTS, AND HOSPITALS, DEC 2011
MSF: SYRIA: MEDICINE AS A WEAPON OF PERSECUTION, 8 FEB 2012
ALERTNET: TIMELINE CRACKDOWN ON PROTESTS IN SYRIA, 24 SEPT 2012
UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY: REPORT OF THE INDEPENDENT INTERNATIONAL COMMISSION ON SAR, 23 NOV 2011
UNHCR


• A U.N. estimate of Syrian refugees has risen by 5,000 since March 16 and currently stands at about 39,000, while hundreds of thousands more are thought to be displaced within Syria, according to the refugee agency UNHCR.

• A Syria Regional Response Plan 2012 is an inter-agency framework led by the UNHCR in coordination with 7 UN agencies, 27 national and international NGOs, partners and host governments. The plan’s three objectives are:

  1. Ensure that Syrians and other refugees have access to neighboring territories, to seek asylum and to receive protection.
  2. Ensure that basic needs of the refugees from the Syrian Arab Republic are met, with special attention to the most vulnerable
  3. Undertake contingency measures for a potential mass influx

TURKEY

• About 17,000 Syrians are in eight camps set up in Turkey’s southern provinces of Hatay and Gaziantep. Of that total, 47 percent are children and 19 percent are women.

• According to UNHCR, 23,000 people have received protection in Turkey since April 2011, but many have returned to Syria.

• The Turkish government plans to move most of the refugees to a purpose-built container city in Kilis province.

• UNHCR has established a permanent presence in Hatay to support the efforts of the government, with a plan to establish an office in Kilis.

• Primary health care is provided in the camps, and anyone with a more serious medical need is treated in the hospital in Antakya. All medical services are free of charge, including prescriptions, optical, and dental care.

LEBANON

• There are more than 16,000 Syrian refugees in Lebanon, including about 5,000 in the Bekaa Valley and 8,000 in northern Lebanon and Tripoli. There are also Syrian refugees in south Beirut.

• Approximately 40% are children under 10 and pregnant women with small children. However, only 7,913 have registered with the UNHCR.

• Primary health care is available through public and private clinics, with UNHCR covering most of the costs. Serious conditions and the wounded are referred to five hospitals in North Lebanon, with the cost of care covered by the government. Some 268 wounded persons have been treated since the beginning of the influx.

IRAQ

• Approximately 500 Syrian refugees, mainly of Kurdish origin, have crossed into Dohuk in the Kurdish administered part of Iraq.

• Exact numbers are still being assessed. The U.N. humanitarian appeal is based on a plan for 1,500 refugees in Iraq in the next six months, with a contingency plan for 5,000.

JORDAN

• In Jordan, over 6,000 Syrians have registered with UNHCR since March of last year, with a further 2,500 awaiting registration. This figure is expected to increase significantly as UNHCR and partners expand their outreach efforts and level of assistance to Syrians.

• The majority of refugees are living with host families, from Irbid and Ramtha in the North and as far as Amman and Maan in the south of Jordan.

• JHAS has a mobile clinic making regular visits to Ramtha and Mafraq, with the government covering the cost of medical treatment in Mafraq

NOTES: Many refugees have arrived with limited means to cover basic needs, and those who could at first rely on savings or support from host families are now increasingly in need of assistance. Quick impact projects for the local communities and distribution of aid items are underway, while plans are being made for a cash assistance program.
SEXUAL AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

VIOLENCE

- On March 19, 2012, The UNHCR reaffirms the condemnation of the continued widespread and systematic violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms by the Syrian authorities, including sexual violence and ill-treatment, including against children and male detainees.

- The UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) is reported to be concerned about families marrying off their young daughters as a way of coping with cash shortages.

- A March 2012 publication by Amnesty International describes some reported forms of torture and ill-treatment of a sexual nature (p. 11).

- In the February 23, 2012, 6722nd Security Council meeting, Syria’s representative, Louay Fallouh, supported all efforts to end sexual violence related to conflict, punish perpetrators and end impunity.

RESPONSE

- In January 2012, the UNHCR dispatched a fact-finding mission in which 180 victims and 223 witnesses were interviewed, including civilians, and defectors from Syrian military and security forces. Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, Margot Wallström, expressed particular concern about:
  - Sexual torture used on male detainees by Syrian military and security forces in facilities of political detention and military intelligence centers occurred in Damascus, Jisr Al Shughour, Idlib, Al Ladhiqiyah, and Tartus.
  - Detainees reported threats of rape against them and their families. Testimony was received from several men who stated that they had been anally raped with batons and had witnessed the rape of boys between the ages of 11-15.
  - Women were sexually assaulted in places of detention (limited evidence).

SOURCES:

UNHCR: REPORT 19 MAR 2012
UNHCR: REPORT 1 MAR 2012
IRIN: UN ASKS FOR HELP RESPONDING TO SYRIAN REFUGEE CRISIS, 23 MAR 2012
UN NEWS: UN REPORT ON SEXUAL VIOLENCE DURING CONFLICT, 23 FEB 2012
UN: SECURITY COUNCIL 6722ND MEETING, 23 FEB 2012
UNHCR: FACT-FINDING MISSION REPORT, 13 JAN 2012
UNHCR: SYRIA REGIONAL RESPONSE PLAN, MAR 2012
BACKGROUND

- Starting in early November 2011, the level of violence between State forces and anti-Government armed groups increased in areas of Homs, Hama, Rif Dimashq and Idlib governorates. State forces withdrew from and then surrounded many of these areas. Army snipers and Shabbiha14 gunmen posted at strategic points terrorized the population, targeting and killing small children, women and other unarmed civilians. Fragmentation mortar bombs were also fired into densely populated neighborhoods.

- After the withdrawal of League of Arab States observers in late January 2012, the army intensified its bombardment with heavy weapons. It gave no warning to the population and unarmed civilians were given no chance to evacuate. As a result, large numbers of people, including many children, were killed.

- Several areas were bombarded and then stormed by State forces, which arrested, tortured and summarily executed suspected defectors and opposition activists.

- Fighting has continued to escalate up to the present.

RECENT VIOLENCE

An escalation in fighting between government and rebel forces continues to result in the deaths of innocent civilians

- 22 MAR - Eighteen witnesses from al-Qusayr, including an international journalist who stayed there from March 8 to 15, 2012, described shelling by the security forces, attacks on fleeing residents, and sniper fire at residents. Their accounts reflect similar tactics used by government forces in Idlib and Homs previously documented by Human Rights Watch

- 22 MAR 2012: Fighting began in the town of Binesh near the Turkish border. Nearby villages also experienced violence.

- 22 MAR 2012: A bus with women and children on board was shot up close to the town of Sermin in the northwestern province of Idlib near the Turkish border. 10 people died.

- 24 MAR 2012: Mortar fire in the city of Homs and the nearby town of Qusayr, killing at least 10 people according to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights. Nationwide, 28 civilians were reported dead, including 2 women and 2 children.

VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN

- UN reports that at least 500 Syrian children have been killed in the violence thus far, while hundreds more have been injured, put in detention or abused. Schools have closed and health centers have shut down or become too dangerous for families to reach.

HUMAN SHIELDS

- Witnesses from the towns of al-Janoudyah, Kafr Nabl, Kafr Rouma, and Ayn Larouz in the Idlib governorate in northern Syria saw the army and pro-government armed men, referred to locally as shabeeha, force people to march in front of the advancing army during the March 2012 offensive to retake control of areas that had fallen into the hands of the opposition. (HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH)

- Government forces placed children on tanks and inside security buses when they entered Ayn Larouz on March 10.

Sources:

HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH: LOCAL RESIDENTS USED AS HUMAN SHIELDS
UNICEF: UNICEF DENOUNCES KILLINGS OF CHILDREN, WOMEN IN SYRIAN CITY OF HOMS, 12 MAR 2012
UNHRC: UN HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL DEMANDS END TO VIOLENCE AND ABUSES IN SYRIA, 23 MAR 2012
RELEIFWEB: UNICEF STEPS UP ITS RESPONSE TO CHILDREN AFFECTED BY CRISIS IN SYRIA, 23 MAR 2012
RELEIFWEB: SYRIAN TROOPS START BOMBARDING BINESH, 22 MAR 2012
RELEIFWEB: SYRIAN ARMY CONTINUES IDLIB ONSLAUGHT, 21 MAR 2012
RELEIFWEB: SYRIAN DEATH TOLL MOUNTS, OPPOSITION SLAMS UN PEACE CALL, 22 MAR 2012

Syrian children hide behind sandbags on the street in the central town of Rastan, near Homs, on March 13, 2012. Photo: Syrian Youth Movement