



OFFICE OF THE DEPUTY REGIONAL HUMANITARIAN COORDINATOR FOR THE SYRIA CRISIS

**Statement by Mark Cutts, Deputy Regional Humanitarian Coordinator for the Syria Crisis
on the recent floods in northwest Syria**

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I am deeply concerned about the devastating impact that the recent floods have had on displaced people living in camps in northwest Syria.

Following extensive efforts by humanitarian workers to reach affected communities, latest reports indicate that at least 121,000 people in 304 sites in northwest Syria were badly affected when torrential rain and strong winds damaged or destroyed at least 21,700 tents. One child was killed, and at least three people were injured. In addition, people who were already struggling to survive had many of their food stocks, household goods and other meagre possessions washed away. Water was contaminated. Small children, the elderly, pregnant mothers and others were left stranded in remote areas in the mud, as temperatures dropped below zero. Thousands of people found themselves cut off from all services and support for days, as rescue workers and humanitarian struggled to reach them and provide support.

Humanitarian staff have been working round the clock to reopen access roads and provide emergency shelter, food, clean water and other relief supplies. It is a massive undertaking, and this work will continue for months. The reality is that people in this area are facing a catastrophic situation. People in these camps are desperate, and humanitarians are overwhelmed by a crisis that the United Nations warned was coming.

There are 2.7 million displaced people in Idlib and other parts of northwest Syria – including 1.6 million people spread out in over 1,300 camps and informal sites. There are not nearly enough health facilities, schools and other essential services for all these people. Just last year, one million people in this area were displaced by fighting. Many of them are still living under olive trees on roadsides, as there are simply not enough camps for all these people. Some governments have been contributing generously, year after year, to the humanitarian response in Syria. Still, the sad reality is that the international response has not matched the scale of the crisis.

As we approach the tenth anniversary of the Syrian conflict, the world needs to take stock of what is going on in Syria. The numbers are staggering. Twelve million people having been forced from their homes – more than half the pre-conflict population – making it the biggest displacement crisis of this century. But it is not just the numbers that matter; it is the level of suffering. With ongoing fighting and displacement, combined with a worsening economic crisis, the ongoing spread of COVID-19, and now floods and freezing temperatures, it is a crisis that is getting worse and worse.

What is needed above all else is an end to the conflict. But in the absence of a political solution, we must ensure the necessary access and funding for the ongoing humanitarian response. Without more funding and support, simple tents that provide limited protection in the winter will continue to be the norm, in sites that lack adequate access roads, gravel, drainage systems and other essential services. People will continue to suffer.

The world cannot turn its back on this massive humanitarian crisis, which is going from bad to worse. We cannot abandon the conflict-affected civilian population, of which over 80 per cent are women, children and the elderly. Above all, what is needed is a political solution. However big the humanitarian crisis may be, everyone agrees that the solutions are ultimately political, not humanitarian.