

**Statement by Panos Moutzsis, Regional Humanitarian Coordinator for the Syria Crisis, on the International Day for Mine Awareness and Assistance in Mine Action****Amman, 4 April 2018**

Today we mark the International Day for Mine Awareness and Assistance in Mine Action. In doing so, we observe not only the work of the mine action sector, but draw attention to the grievous threat posed by landmines, unexploded ordnance, and other explosive remnants of war.

In Syria, the humanitarian crisis has entered its eighth year of hostilities and is characterized by the large-scale use of explosive weaponry, including improvised explosive hazards in some areas. Explosive hazard contamination has been widely reported in many locations across the country, including in Aleppo, Dara'a, Rural Damascus, Idleb, Raqqa and Deir ez-Zor governorates. The United Nations estimates that 8.2 million women, men, girls, and boys are living in communities contaminated with explosive hazards, which threaten their lives and livelihoods, hamper their access to basic services, and endanger the ability to safely deliver aid to those in need.

Explosive hazards with wide-area effects continue to be used in populated urban and rural areas, increasing casualties and compounding the vulnerability of civilians living and travelling within these areas.

An alarming number of civilians, including children, have been verified killed or injured in explosive hazard-related incidents.

In Raqqa alone, the scale of the explosive hazard threat is unprecedented, in part due to the extensive contamination by improvised explosive devices hidden throughout the city. Since October 2017, there have been over 780 reported injuries and deaths caused by explosive hazards, a number that is expected to be higher due to under reporting. The number of cases involving children is increasing as more families move back to the city.

Mine action advances protection, peace and development. It is a key component of the humanitarian response to the crisis in Syria. In line with UN Security Council Resolutions 2393 and 2365, humanitarian mine action partners continue to provide lifesaving risk education for millions of people country-wide, conduct explosive hazard surveys to identify hazards and inform local communities, and implement victim assistance services for survivors of explosive incidents and their families.

While mine action plays a key role in advancing protection in Syria, explosive hazards remain a major humanitarian obstacle. Reducing the threat on the civilian population requires increased access and support for humanitarian mine action capacities throughout Syria.

Increased access and resources for expanded mine action operations are urgently required. Increasing risk education, survey and marking capacities, which does not require sensitive equipment, only trained teams and an enabling security environment, is a critical step to mitigate the threat of explosive hazards. There is also a critical need to expand capacity for the clearance of explosive hazards throughout the country as the only way to remove the threat to civilians is to remove the threats themselves.