

# **Top UN Official Says Situation in Syria ‘Humanitarian Catastrophe’, Calls on Security Council to Take Actions Needed to End ‘Brutal Conflict’**

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### **Security Council to Take Actions Needed to End ‘Brutal Conflict’**

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**Briefed by Emergency Relief Coordinator, Refugee Commissioner,**

**Top Envoys on Sexual Violence in Conflict, Children in Armed Conflict**

Describing the situation in Syria as a “humanitarian catastrophe” with ordinary people paying the price for the failure to end the conflict, a senior United Nations official said today that even amid that grim reality and the possibility looming that humanitarian programmes critical to ease the suffering might have to be shut down, the Security Council had been unable to reach the consensus needed to support a political resolution to the crisis.

Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator Valerie Amos told the Council “we are approaching a point of no return”, and she could not overstate the seriousness of the situation. Also briefing today were António Guterres, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees; Zainab Hawa Bangura, the Secretary-General’s Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict; and Leila Zerrougui, Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict.

“I do not have an answer for those Syrians I have spoken to who ask me why the world has abandoned them,” said Ms. Amos. The parties had become increasingly entrenched in a brutal conflict that was not only shattering Syria’s present, but also destroying its future. Major cities had been devastated, there was no blood bank or even suture thread at a hospital where more than 3,500 war-wounded patients had been treated, people were bombed while lining up for some bread, and children were murdered, tortured and subjected to violence. Still, her descriptions could not begin to give the real picture of the daily horrors.

In closing, she said the Council must find ways to reduce the violence and stop the bloodshed, stressing that her appeal was on behalf of the Syrian people, but also on behalf of all those seeking to assist them. “We are losing hope. We cannot do our jobs properly. We look to you to take the action necessary to end this brutal conflict.”

Speaking via video link from Geneva, Mr. Guterres said he was almost tempted to limit his statement to just 10 seconds because everything he had said in February remained true, “but, it all got much worse”. If nothing politically dramatic happens, “things will go on getting worse”; there might be up to 3.5 million Syrian refugees by the end of this year and 6.5 million in need of humanitarian assistance inside the country.

The situation was not just frightening; it risked becoming simply unsustainable, he warned. There was no way to adequately respond to those enormous humanitarian needs and it was difficult to imagine a nation could endure so much suffering. Citizens of the world could not but ask: Isn't there a way to stop this fighting to open the door to a political solution? Pending such a miracle, there was a collective duty to assist all Syrians who had sought safety abroad.

Syria presented much more than a humanitarian crisis, he said, as the conflict risked spilling over across the region and escalating into a political, security and “total” humanitarian disaster that would completely overwhelm the international response capacity. To avoid such a situation, the first step was to provide “massive” support to the two countries most dramatically impacted by the conflict and refugee outflow: Jordan and Lebanon. In addition, Turkey had provided \$750 million in direct assistance to more than 300,000 refugees.

“Today, I am here to plead with you on behalf of victims of sexual violence in Syria,” Ms. Bangura said, adding that the victims had been raped — in front of their fathers and husbands — tortured and humiliated. It was likely the estimated hundreds of survivors were only the “tip of the iceberg”. Government and opposition forces were abducting women and children to extract intelligence or use them as leverage for prisoners’ release. Plus, civilian vulnerability and the possibility of “revenge rapes” had increased as the conflict became more sectarian and violations more militarized, with the presence of foreign fighters, including those affiliated with Islamist groups.

Everyone knew that war could be brutal, but “to fight it on the bodies of women and children [...] can never be acceptable”, she said. Her message to the perpetrators: “Justice may be delayed, but it will not be denied,” she said, adding: “We will pursue you by any and all means, we will find you, and one day bring you to justice.” Pleading with the

Council members and Governments with influence on those parties to the Syrian conflict to end “this carnage”, she said, “we have watched, we have discussed, and now it is time to take concrete action”.

Ms. Zerrougui said the conflict, now entering its third year, had been a catastrophe for civilians, and children had suffered in the most heart-breaking way. “This emergency, indeed, is a children’s crisis,” she said, noting there were now more than 3 million children affected inside the country, of whom almost 2 million were internally displaced. Additionally, more than 600,000 children were refugees in the subregion. She told the Council that its urgent action on behalf of those children “cannot wait another day”.

The Syrian, Lebanese and Turkish envoys addressed the Council following those briefings. The Syrian delegate thanked those who had made appeals today, but said he had hoped they would have touched on the core issues for the suffering, namely the unilateral coercive illegal measures imposed on the Syrian people. The dangers stemmed from the spread of international terrorism on Syrian territory, the impact of which was destruction, mass killing and displacement.

After two years of “trading in the fate of Syria and the blood of its citizens”, he said, there must be earnest work to help move the country forward via a political solution endorsed by United Nations resolutions and the Geneva communiqué. Such a political solution must be a Syrian-led inclusive national dialogue, in which all citizens were represented.

Regarding the impact of the Syrian crisis on neighbouring countries, the Lebanese Ambassador said the fighting had reached its borders, threatening its security and affecting its society and economy. Lebanon was the smallest neighbour with the least resources, yet it had received the most Syrian refugees, soon to comprise almost one quarter of the population. While Lebanon would never close its borders to anyone seeking refuge from the horrors of violence and destruction, it was also its right to ask the international community to share the burden.

Turkey, said its representative, was doing its utmost to respond, hosting over 190,000 Syrians in 17 camps, and 100,000 people who had found their way into Turkish cities and towns. It also was delivering humanitarian relief at its borders, transparently and in line with humanitarian principles. He pressed the Council to consider alternative forms of aid delivery, including cross-border options, as existing methods were not yielding full and unimpeded access. Further, alternative destinations must be found for those fleeing Syria, he said, noting that other regional leaders had also sounded that call.

Today’s meeting began at 10:11 a.m. and was adjourned at 12:12 p.m.

## Briefings

VALERIE AMOS, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, described the situation in Syria as a “humanitarian catastrophe”, with ordinary people paying the price for the failure to end the conflict. The parties had become increasingly entrenched in the rhetoric and reality of war with a total disregard for the impact on peoples’ lives. And this body — the Security Council — had been unable to reach the consensus necessary to support a political resolution to the crisis.

She said that the destruction of essential infrastructure, including schools and hospitals, devaluation of the currency — an 80 to 90 per cent loss of value — rising food prices, fuel and electricity shortages, and lack of water had an impact on the majority of Syrians. The needs were growing rapidly and were most severe in the conflict and opposition-controlled areas. The latest figures showed 6.8 million people in need, 4.25 million people internally displaced, with another 1.3 million having sought refuge in neighbouring countries. The economic collapse had stripped people of their ability to cope. As needs grew dramatically, so too did the constraints inhibiting the ability to scale up the humanitarian response.

Syria’s main cities had been devastated: Deir Az Zor, Hama, Homs and Idlib had been reduced to rubble, she said. A United Nations inter-agency convoy that crossed the front lines in Aleppo last week had witnessed the extraordinary destruction in the city, large parts of which did not have running water because there was no electricity. Waste was piling up, raising fears that diseases would multiply as the summer heat approached. And, there were growing concerns about outbreaks of diarrhoea, and potentially even cholera, if the most basic of services could not be urgently restored. The convoy had also visited a hospital in Aleppo, where more than 3,500 war-wounded patients had reportedly been treated. There was no blood bank; doctors were performing surgery at times without anaesthetic or even suture thread; and the hospital and staff was regularly hit during fighting.

However, she said, her descriptions “cannot begin to give you the real picture of the horrors being meted out every day”. There had been testimonies of houses burnt with families inside; of people being bombed and killed while queuing for a piece of bread. “This is the reality of Syria today,” she said. Children were among those suffering the most. More than 3 million had already been affected, including 2 million displaced. Children had been murdered, tortured and subjected to sexual violence. Many did not have enough food to eat. Millions had been traumatized by the horrors they had witnessed. “This brutal conflict is not only shattering Syria’s present; it is also destroying its future,” she said.

Since her visit to the country in January, “bureaucratic obstacles have grown and are inhibiting our ability to respond”. As an example, approval to open United Nations hubs in six key cities had been issued more than a year ago, yet that had only been operationalized recently for two cities, with a commitment to continue discussions on two more. Non-governmental organizations had been cleared to accept United Nations funding, but projects designed in February to be resourced under the Emergency Response Fund were still awaiting final approval from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Twenty-two armoured vehicles, so vital for staff security, were still pending approval for import. In the last 24 hours, she had been told that every truck needed a permit signed by two ministers. “When I tell the Council that a convoy from Damascus to Aleppo goes through 50 checkpoints — half of them Government-controlled — you will appreciate the impossibility of this request. We cannot do business this way.”

The conflict and proliferation of armed groups had made Syria a highly unpredictable and insecure environment, jeopardizing aid organizations’ operations, she said. In the case of Aleppo, for example, contrary to some widely held perceptions, aid flows across the Turkish border had been reduced significantly in the past two months. “So, we are not reaching those most urgently in need of our help.” Strengthening the Assistance Coordination Unit, the humanitarian arms of the Syrian Coalition, should not come at the expense of the Syrian Arab Red Crescent. The data available showed that people in opposition-held areas were “in the most urgent need; we have a duty and responsibility to try to reach them”.

She said she had been horrified to hear accounts, during her recent visit to Turkey, of children dying from hunger. “We need to get aid into these hard-to-reach areas,” she said, adding, however, that it was difficult to do so owing to bureaucratic constraints. Across Syria, humanitarian convoys were regularly attacked or shot at, and staff were intimidated or kidnapped. The so-called “SARC” volunteers, she noted, had shown incredible dedication, impartiality and courage; many did not hesitate to risk their lives every day to bring assistance to people in need. However, the Council must consider alternative forms of aid delivery, including cross-border operations, as too many lives were being lost.

Citing some positive scenarios, she said that World Food Programme (WFP) assistance had reached close to 2 million people countrywide, many in areas controlled by the opposition, and the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) had reached more than 5 million people with safe water. It aimed to reach an additional 5 million in the coming months through chlorination and repair of urban and rural water supply systems. The World Health Organization (WHO) and its partners had provided primary and secondary health-care services to approximately 2.7 million Syrians, and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) was assisting the 400,000 Palestinian refugees, many of whom faced future displacement. Since her last briefing, about half of the \$1.5 billion required to cover Syria’s humanitarian needs until

June had been received, with the recent allocation of the \$300 million pledged by the Kuwaiti Government. Member States must urgently convert their conference pledges to cash.

“I cannot overstate the seriousness of the current situation in Syria,” she said, adding, “I do not have an answer for those Syrians I have spoken to who ask me why the world has abandoned them.” While the humanitarian situation on the ground was becoming more and more disastrous every day, the limitations on the ground “have forced us to being precariously close to suspending some critical humanitarian programmes”. Proclaiming “we are approaching a point of no return”, she said the Council, as a matter of priority, must find ways to reduce the violence and stop the bloodshed. Everyone looked to the 15-member body to guarantee the peace and security of the people of the world.

In closing, she said her appeal to the Council was on behalf of the Syrian people, but it is also on behalf of all those seeking to assist them. “We are losing hope. We cannot do our jobs properly. We look to you to take the action necessary to end this brutal conflict,” she urged.

Briefing the Council via video link from Geneva, ANTÓNIO GUTERRES, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, said he was almost tempted to limit his statement to just 10 seconds. Everything he had outlined in his last statement in February remained true. “But, it all got much worse, and if nothing politically dramatic happens, things will go on getting worse for the months to come.” In December, refugees were fleeing Syria at a rate of 3,000 a day. In January, that number had grown to 5,000, and since February, 8,000 people were crossing Syria’s borders every day: that was 400,000 new refugees in the seven weeks since his last briefing to the Council.

As of yesterday — counting only those registered or waiting to be registered — there were 1,349,356 Syrian refugees across the Middle East and North Africa, he continued. Including the internally displaced, a quarter of Syria’s population had been forced to leave their homes. But, those “stark” numbers said little about the horrendous suffering of a people, the progressive collapse of a State and the physical destruction of a country. “Let us be very clear: there is no humanitarian solution for the Syrian crisis,” he stressed, which was why it was so dramatic that there had not been “an inch” of progress towards a political solution.

As such, humanitarian workers were forced to plan for the impossible, he said. Together, with its 60 partner organizations and host States, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) was preparing the fifth version of its Regional Response Plan to assist the growing number of refugees, while the Emergency Relief Coordinator was leading similar efforts to update the humanitarian assistance plan inside

Syria. Describing the preliminary planning figures as “terrifying”, he said if nothing changed, there could be up to 3.5 million Syrian refugees by the end of the year, and up to 6.5 million people in need of humanitarian assistance inside the country. “This is not just frightening,” he said. “It risks becoming simply unsustainable,” as there was no way to adequately respond to such enormous need.

While he understood that, as the High Commissioner, he should confine his remarks to the scope of his mandate, he said that, as a citizen of the world, he could not help but ask: “Isn’t there any way to stop this fighting and open the door for a political solution?” While waiting for such a miracle, there was a collective duty to do everything to protect, assist and respect the dignity of all Syrians who had sought safety abroad. Humanitarian actors required financial support that was out of proportion with humanitarian aid budgets of traditional donors. With colleagues from UNICEF, WFP and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, he had asked Governments to establish extraordinary funding mechanisms.

He went on to say that Syria presented much more than a humanitarian crisis; the conflict risked spilling over across the region and escalating into a political, security and “total” humanitarian disaster that would completely overwhelm the international response capacity. To avoid such a situation, the first step was to provide “massive” support to the two countries most dramatically impacted by the conflict and refugee outflow: Jordan and Lebanon. In addition, Turkey had provided \$750 million in direct assistance to more than 300,000 refugees.

Jordan and Lebanon, each hosting about one third of the registered refugee population in the region, must be provided especially solid support, he said. For Lebanon, the Syrian crisis had become an existential threat, with its population having grown by more than 10 per cent if one only counted the registered Syrian refugees. Some estimated that up to one quarter of the population could be Syrian. Lebanese households hosted more than 25 Syrians under their roofs. Security incidents along the border posed a serious challenge. Moreover, the country had not received any direct international support in recent months. “This has to change urgently,” he asserted.

Jordan was also coming under tremendous pressure, he said. It had been facing a struggling economy prior to the conflict and the situation had grown more fragile since 2011. The Syria crisis had led to a significant drop in revenue from trade, tourism and foreign investment. Amid Jordan’s “worrying” economic indicators, unsustainable public and external deficits and tough austerity measures, he appealed to States to extend the massive financial support Jordan needed, with the understanding that its economic adjustment required significant flexibility to prevent levels of social unrest that could jeopardize Jordan’s stability.



Helping Syria's neighbours deal with the human fallout of the conflict was crucial for preserving the stability of the region, he said. "This is not just another refugee crisis," he warned. "What happens in Syria and in the neighbouring countries potentially has much wider — even global — implications." By keeping their borders open to thousands of refugees, Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey and others were doing an extraordinary service to the international community. Failure to give them the support they needed would mean abandoning a people and an entire region. "It would be the world's blindness to its own best interest," he concluded.

ZAINAB HAWA BANGURA, Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, said: "Today, I am here to plead with you on behalf of victims of sexual violence in Syria." Those victims had been raped, tortured and humiliated. They were either internally displaced or refugees. They did not have a voice and they were not part of any statistics, but her estimate that there were hundreds of survivors was likely only the "tip of the iceberg". Girls were raped in front of their fathers, wives in front of their husbands. Government and opposition forces were abducting women and children to extract intelligence, at times, using them as leverage for prisoners' release.

She said that civilian vulnerability and the possibility of "revenge rapes" had increased as the conflict became more sectarian and violations more militarized, with the presence of foreign fighters, including those affiliated with Islamist groups. The systematic practice of sexual violence in detention as part of an organizational policy against women, men and even children was also appalling. She described the experiences of two 14-year-old youths, saying: "We know that war can be brutal, but to fight it on the bodies of women and children — humiliating and punishing them, and subjecting them to absolute terror — can never be acceptable."

In response to her February briefing, the Syrian Government, in a letter, had shared details of incidents of kidnapping, sexual violence, torture and other human rights violations carried out by opposition fighters and she had also been provided an account of a kidnapping by the Free Syrian Army in which a young girl was raped and killed. She strongly urged the leadership of the Free Syrian Army and other armed group to halt such violations, issue clear directive to commanders to that effect, and hold those who committed, commanded or condoned such crimes accountable. She similarly urged President Bashar al-Assad in the strongest terms to ensure that all persons in Government custody were treated humanely in accordance with international human rights and humanitarian law. She also reiterated her call for the Syrian authorities to investigate all allegations of sexual violence and hold each and every perpetrator accountable.

“These perpetrators know the world is watching; they know the international community will hold those responsible for such heinous acts liable. They can misinform, they can lie, but my message to them is clear: justice may be delayed, but it will not be denied,” she said, adding: “We will pursue you by any and all means, we will find you, and one day bring you to justice.” It was a terrible truth that sexual violence maimed the survivors, not only physically, but also psychologically and socially, with deep and long-lasting consequences. Survivors felt they would rather be killed than raped. Many, in fact, had attempted suicide. While work continued to end the conflict, “we must not forget our obligations to the survivors of sexual violence”.

The United Nations and non-governmental organizations were assisting the problem, she said, adding that daily, thousands fled Syria to neighbouring countries in search of safety and protection, only to remain vulnerable in the various refugee camps. Allegations of trafficking of young women and girls were also on the rise, amid a severe shortage of medical and psycho-social counselling services. There were those in Syria who were less visible, but no less vulnerable. She knew about the human rights violations being perpetrated against the displaced women in children and asked what measures could be put in place to prevent and respond to the sexual violence against them.

“We have watched, we have discussed, and now it is time to take concrete action,” she said, adding that she had “in her corner” the support of the Council and that of the G8. On behalf of the survivors, she pleaded with the Council members and Governments with influence on those parties to the Syrian conflict to demonstrate their commitment and translate their will into results “by ending this carnage”.

LEILA ZERROUGUI, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, said the Syrian conflict, now entering its third year, had been a catastrophe for civilians and children had suffered in the most heart-breaking way. “This emergency, indeed, is a children’s crisis,” she said, noting there were now more than 3 million children affected inside the country, of whom almost 2 million were internally displaced. Additionally, more than 600,000 children were refugees in the subregion.

Though the extent of the violations against children could never be determined, she said thousands of children had been killed and thousands more had been injured in the fighting. They had been killed in their homes, in their schools, and some had died trying to reach hospitals or while hiding in shelters. The use of cluster munitions had resulted in hundreds of children who had lost hands, arms and legs. Indeed, children were in need of urgent medical care, yet often were unable to access it. More than half of Syria’s health facilities had been damaged or could not be safely accessed. About 40 per cent of hospitals were inoperative.

In addition, the education system had been deeply impacted, she said, with many schools occupied by warring parties, damaged or destroyed. Teachers were reportedly being killed, threatened and forced to flee. Recent figures showed that an estimated 2,500 schools had been damaged or destroyed, while about 2,000 were being used as shelters for internally displaced persons. In some areas, children had not been able to attend school in more than 18 months.

Further, Palestinian and other refugee children had been killed or forced to flee their homes, she said, adding that only 35 per cent of Palestinian children could access schools. On her visit to Damascus last December, she had met many Palestinian children living in “dire” circumstances in Yarmouk camp, where security was precarious, and she could not help but think about the fear they and their families faced daily.

With no end to the conflict in sight, children were becoming more vulnerable to being recruited and used, directly and indirectly, by all parties to the conflict, she said. Her Office had been gathering information on children as young as 10 years old being used as porters, messengers and combatants by opposition groups. It also had received reports of children being used as human shields by Government forces, and she called on all parties to immediately halt any association with children.

She went on to say that the disproportionate use of force — and the fact that combat was largely taking place in civilian areas — was seriously affecting both children and the wider social fabric that protected them: their families and care givers. High levels of violence on children would have long-term impacts on the country. All children and families with whom she had spoken had recounted “horrific” stories of death, destruction and a cycle of violence with no end.

“I am here not only to brief you on the terrible impact the conflict is having on the children of Syria, but to implore you to do more to make all parties take up their responsibilities to protect the children of Syria,” she declared. She had held talks with the Government and opposition forces and received commitments from both sides. But, the space to act on those commitments was shrinking and she urged the Council to remind all parties of their responsibilities.

For its part, the Government must commit to take all necessary precautions during combat to prevent child death and injury, she said, as well as avoid the use of heavy weaponry in civilian areas; immediately cease the use of human shields and investigate all allegations in that regard. Opposition forces were urged to fulfil their commitments to respect international humanitarian law and, in particular, engage with the United Nations to address the issue of children among their ranks.

“Your urgent action on behalf of these children cannot wait another day,” she stressed to the Council, pointing out that each day that passed cost countless lives.

### Statements

BASHAR JA'AFARI ( Syria) said that anyone thinking to turn back the clock was an illusionist, because the Syrian people would not allow anyone to threaten the country's sovereignty, dignity, political independence and national unity. He thanked the appeals made today, but said he had hoped they would have touched on the core issues causing the suffering, namely the unilateral coercive illegal measures imposed on the Syrian people. The dangers and challenges they faced stemmed from the spread of international terrorism on Syrian territory, the impact of which was destruction, mass killing and displacement. The setting for Syria's balanced regional role was a volatile area fraught with manipulation and bloody alliances between the Arabs “living in an era of ignorance” and Israel's interests and its protectors.

Indeed, he said, the crisis in Syria had unveiled serious flaws in international relations, as well as in the application of international law and the United Nations Charter. Syrians faced unprecedented double standards and scandalous political hypocrisy, which left no room for doubt about the selectivity through which the mechanisms of so-called international action operated. The blind terrorism devastating his nation found zealous supporters here — the same parties who claimed to be fighting terrorism in Mali and the African Sahel. The economic blockade was stifling his country, at a time when the European Union was discussing purchasing Syrian oil.

He said the Syrian people would not forgive anyone who facilitated the movement of thousands of European and Western terrorists and jihadists sponsored by well-known intelligence agencies across the borders of dozens of countries, from Australia to the United States, to reach the Turkish, Lebanese and Jordanian borders with Syria. They were accommodated in training camps before entering his country to spread destruction and sabotage, and shed innocent blood. They could also not forget the Israeli partnership with the Salafi, Takfiri and terrorist groups that allowed passage through the separation line in the Syrian Golan for treatment in Israeli hospitals. Such actions were illegal and immoral.

Turning to the humanitarian situation, he said he knew that the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs had received only 34 per cent of the required funding, which confirmed that the pledges were nothing more than media propaganda promoted by “crisis traders and lies and falsity promoters”. Certain parties contributed to sustaining the cycle of violence by supporting terrorist groups affiliated with Al-Qaida. There were even reports that some Governments were bought off by petrodollars to persuade them to open their

borders to weapons deliveries. Weapons, including from the Libyan arms depots and purchased by Qatari-Saudi petrodollars, were smuggled across neighbouring countries into Syria.

He emphasized the exclusive responsibility of the Syrian Government to protect its civilians in a way that safeguarded the country's sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity, and restored its constructive and leadership role in the international arena. The "crude and excessively passive and aggressive propaganda" by some Governments and agencies — humanitarian intervention, no-fly zones, safe humanitarian corridors, and responsibility to protect — were attempts to justify interference in Syria's domestic affairs. Some host countries also tried to exacerbate the Syrian refugee crisis by preventing them from returning to their homeland and "trading" on their suffering, despite repeated requests by his Government for those States to allow those returns.

On the subject of sexual violence, he said his country had not witnessed, throughout its history, "anything like this kind of heinous crimes committed by the thugs of Jihad and bandits". Women were enjoying the environment of security and safety available to them in Syria, which used to rank third in the world in terms of safety. However, a complex factor of sabotage had entered Syrian society and "distorted this behavioural reality". Armed terrorist groups carrying Wahhabi, Salari and Takfiri-imported ideology from petro dollar Gulf countries entered through neighbouring countries, with Western complicity and Israeli partnership. That resulted in a deliberate and systematic sabotage of the security and safety of the Syrians, including women and children.

He noted that dozens of political and media reports had proven the recruitment of children by terrorist groups. They were ordered to participate in acts of murder and sabotage, burning and looting, and the destruction of more than 3,000 schools and kindergartens. His country was committed to its obligations under the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in arms conflict. While States sought to build their social contract based on diversity, pluralism, harmony and real citizenship, strong subversive Powers were trying to break that pact in his region by promoting the concept of slaughtering people on the basis of their identity and seeking to displace important components of societies outside their homeland.

After two years of "trading in the fate of Syria and the blood of its citizens", he said there must be earnest work to help his country, people and Government to move forward via a political solution endorsed by United Nations resolutions and the Geneva communiqué. His Government insisted that such a political solution must be applied through a Syrian-led, inclusive national dialogue, in which all Syrians were represented.

NAWAF SALAM (Lebanon) said the “painful” figures mentioned today not only spoke to the magnitude of the humanitarian disaster, but also to the incapacity of the international community to take necessary measures to end the violence and human rights violations that had persisted in Syria for two years. Syrian women, men and children had been shaken by bombings, displaced or become refugees. “All of them deserve a better life that will meet their aspirations and hopes”.

In the Council, Lebanon had repeated its position on territorial integrity and sovereignty of Syria, he said, as well as its policy on preserving the unity of Lebanon. That policy had received support from the international community. Lebanon had never disassociated from international law or legality, and had been faithful to its historic and geographic links with Syria. It had not forgotten that Syrians had received thousands of refugees during Israel’s war against Lebanon in 2006.

As of 12 April, almost 416,000 Syrian refugees in Lebanon had received aid from UNHCR, he said, adding that that figure did not capture the tens of thousands of people who had not yet asked to be registered with UNHCR. Data from UNRWA showed that, as of 31 March, there were some 36,000 Palestinian refugees in Syria. About 3,000 refugees were fleeing Syria each day. About half of the refugees in Lebanon and other neighbouring countries were children.

Regarding the impact of the Syrian crisis on neighbouring countries, he said: “We have warned about this consistently,” adding that the fighting had reached the borders with Lebanon and threatened its security — violations which he condemned, regardless of their reasons or origin.

In addition, refugees had affected Lebanese society, he said, as well as the economy and security. There was more pressure on the labour market, food and food prices, and rents. Nonetheless, “Lebanon will never close its borders to anyone seeking refuge from the horrors of violence and destruction,” he said, underscoring his Government’s commitment to providing all refugees from Syria with protection, shelter, health care and education.

At the same time, it was also Lebanon’s right to ask the international community to share the burden, he said, noting that Lebanon was the smallest neighbouring country with the least resources, yet it had received the most Syrian refugees. Refugees would soon comprise almost one quarter of the Lebanese population, higher than any other country hosting refugees. It would not be able to provide the necessary care if the numbers of refugees — Syrians, Palestinians and Lebanese returning from Syria — kept growing.

Recalling the words of the regional representative of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Nanette Kelly, he said that programmes to guarantee food, water, education, health care and shelter for refugees would be impossible without funding. WFP country operations head Etienne Labande also had warned that with the current funding, in one month, more than 400,000 Syrian refugees in Lebanon would no longer receive food assistance. The High Commissioner himself had just told the Council that Lebanon could not bear this burden alone.

Against that backdrop, he reiterated the call of Lebanon's President in March for an international conference on Syrian refugees to be held that would find a way to share the burden, in line with the principle of shared responsibility, and reduce the impact of refugees on internal and regional peace and security. For its part, the Council should use all means at its disposal to save the Syrian people — and the region — from disaster.

YAŞAR HALİT ÇEVİK ( Turkey) said he had followed today's presentations with great concern. Syrians' quest for a free country had completed its second year, while the regime targeted its own people, including with ballistic missiles, destroying cultural heritage and infrastructure. "The humanitarian situation is deteriorating day after day," he said. Recent United Nations figures had shown that the numbers of refugees had reached 1.3 million, with 4.5 million people internally displaced and 6 million in urgent need of humanitarian assistance. There would be 3.5 million refugees by year-end if the international community failed to act.

"The international community has a moral responsibility to support the Syrian people in their struggle," he said, which must be done, as the humanitarian situation threatened regional peace and stability. This week's joint appeal by United Nations agencies was a "serious wake-up call" to revisit strategies for addressing the crisis and to start thinking "outside the box" to save both Syria and the region from catastrophe.

The best way to end the bloodshed was through a political solution and transition that also ensured Syria's integrity, he said, stressing that the United Nations had a crucial role to play in that regard. Pending such a solution, he urged the Council to be "realistic and results-oriented". Turkey was doing its utmost to respond, hosting over 190,000 Syrians in 17 camps, and 100,000 people who had found their ways into Turkish cities and towns. It also was delivering humanitarian relief at its borders, transparently and in line with humanitarian principles.

Regarding access, he pressed the Council to consider alternative forms of aid delivery, including cross-border options, as existing methods were not working to realize the principle of full and unimpeded humanitarian access. Also, in line with the principle of burden-sharing, the international community must take concerted action by discussing

unexplored ways to address internally displaced persons in Syria. Further, alternative destinations must be found for those choosing to leave the country. Such a call already had been made by regional leaders feeling the same pressure.

Indeed, it was time the United Nations took into account those concerns. “Otherwise, we may find ourselves in a crisis scenario much larger than what we have been struggling with,” he said, expressing support for Syrians’ legitimate aspirations to live in dignity. Turkey would continue to do its utmost to respond to the humanitarian crisis across its borders. The international community must also act “urgently and decisively” before it was too late.

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