

Joint statement on Syria by UN and WHO

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Statement

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After five years of a brutal and senseless conflict over a quarter of a million Syrians have been killed and over half the population forced from their homes out of fear and want. Some 4.6 million people are barely existing in places that few can leave and aid cannot reach. A further 4.8 million people have fled the country. Syria today is a very different place – almost unrecognizable in parts – that will take generations to rebuild.

In the past few weeks however, we are seeing signs of momentum, fragile glimmers of hope. Fewer bombs are falling; humanitarian access has opened up in some places; negotiators from all sides are preparing to come together and talk. As humanitarians we welcome progress where it means real change.

The United Nations, NGOs and partners have seized new opportunities to reach people who have had nothing for a very long time. Despite danger and uncertainty we are trying new delivery methods, constantly trying to negotiate ways to reach people. Through regular aid and the recent deliveries to besieged towns we have managed to reach over six million people since the beginning of 2016.

However, until all parties to this conflict stop attacking civilians, schools, markets and hospitals, we will continue to press them on their obligations and hold them to account. Medical supplies and equipment are still being removed at checkpoints: this is unacceptable.

Until parties to the conflict fully open up safe, unimpeded access to everyone we will keep trying to reach civilians by all and any means possible, however challenging. We are able to reach more people now in besieged areas: but we are yet to reach one in every five besieged Syrians who urgently need help and protection.

While we are starting to get basic supplies to communities who have been cut off for months or more, it is just not enough. For example, we are extremely concerned about the situation in northern rural Homs and in Aleppo, where around 500,000 people are caught behind active frontlines. Two million people are in areas controlled by ISIL.

We and our partners remain ready to deliver assistance. The United Nations continues to work to negotiate access with all parties and to deliver aid to people across the hard-to-reach areas, including the besieged locations we have not yet been able to reach.

No one wants to see a sixth year of conflict start on 15 March. Young people across Syria need to hope and believe that their future lies in their homeland. That they will have education, healthcare, homes and jobs. That life holds more than fear, violence and hunger.

We use our collective voice to call on all parties, local and international, for this anniversary to be the last one and for the political talks to bring real peace and an end to the suffering in Syria.

Signees:

- Stephen O'Brien, Emergency Relief Coordinator, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs
- Ertharin Cousin, Executive Director, World Food Programme
- Anthony Lake, Executive Director, United Nations Children's Fund
- Filippo Grandi, UN High Commissioner for Refugees
- Dr Margaret Chan, Director-General, World Health Organization
- William Lacy Swing, Director General, International Organization for Migration
- Pierre Krähenbühl, Commissioner-General, UN Relief & Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East
- Helen Clark, Administrator, UN Development Programme
- Samuel Worthington, Chief Executive Officer, InterAction
- Leila Zerrougui, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict
- Zainab Hawa Bangura, Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict

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