

# Syria: Senior UN officials strongly condemn attacks on health personnel, facilities

[UN news.un.org/en/story/2013/12/457272](http://news.un.org/en/story/2013/12/457272)

December 7, 2013



UNICEF

UNICEF has joined the World Health Organization (WHO) and partners to launch a huge immunization campaign against polio in Syria.

7 December 2013

Healthcare workers in Syria must be protected, senior United Nations humanitarian officials have said issuing a fresh call for the protection of medical facilities and for safe access to medicines, vaccines and other vital humanitarian aid in the country.

“It is of the interest of both parties in the conflict and of all Syrian people to preserve the neutrality and the functionality of health infrastructure,” UN Emergency Relief Coordinator Valerie Amos, Director-General of the UN World Health Organization (WHO) Margaret Chan, and Executive Director of the UN Children's Agency ([UNICEF](http://www.unicef.org)) Anthony Lake said late last night.

In the [joint statement](#), the officials “strongly condemn” attacks on health and any other civilian facilities in Syria and added that they are “deeply concerned by the serious implications for patients, health personnel and provision of critical medical supplies”.

Over 60 per cent of public hospitals are not functioning in Syria and a similar percentage of ambulances stolen or damaged, according to UN figures.

“At a time when hospitals are overwhelmed with patients, it is vital that these facilities be protected and medical staff be allowed to provide urgent medical, surgical and obstetric care to patients without any risk,” the officials said.

They noted that attacks against health facilities can be considered a war crime under international law.

“All parties must respect their obligations under international humanitarian law to protect civilians, health facilities and health professionals,” they urged.

Despite the insecurity and serious access challenges the UN and partners have helped vaccinate more than 3.3 million children against measles and polio in recent weeks, according to figures provided by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs ([OCHA](#)).

Meanwhile, over 8,000 women have received reproductive and maternal health services, the UN agency said, and hundreds of thousands of people with chronic health problems are being treated with medical supplies and training provided by the UN and partners.

The statement also deplored the escalating violence in a conflict that has killed more than 100, 000 people and driven some 6.5 million others from their homes since opposition protesters first sought to oust the Government of President Bashar al-Assad in March 2011.

On Tuesday, Ms. Amos briefed the UN [Security Council](#) behind closed doors on challenges to humanitarian access in the war-torn country. She said that despite “modest progress” with the Government on speeding up visa issuance and increasing the number of relief distribution hubs, perhaps 250,000 Syrians remain cut off from aid.

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3 December 2013

Reporting “modest progress” with the Syrian Government on speeding up visa issuance and increasing the number of relief distribution hubs, a top United Nations official said today that with perhaps 250,000 Syrians cut off from aid in besieged communities across the war-torn country, greater efforts are needed to ensure real gains on the humanitarian front.