

On the fifth year anniversary of the conflict in Syria, UNRWA shares the United Nations' joint humanitarian statement

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15 March 2016



Qabr Essit camp, south of Damascus, Syria, December 2014. © 2014 UNRWA photo by Taghrid Mohammad

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.

New York/Geneva/Rome/Amman, 11 March 2016

Signees:

Stephen O'Brien, Emergency Relief Coordinator, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs

Ertharin Cousin, Executive Director, World Food Programme

Anthony Lake, Executive Director, UNICEF

Filippo Grandi, 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

Background Information:

UNRWA is confronted with an increased demand for services resulting from a growth in the number of registered Palestine refugees, the extent of their vulnerability and their deepening poverty. UNRWA is funded almost entirely by voluntary contributions and financial support has been outpaced by the growth in needs. As a result, the UNRWA programme budget, which supports the delivery of core essential services, operates with a large shortfall. UNRWA encourages all Member States to work collectively to exert all possible efforts to fully fund the Agency's programme budget. UNRWA emergency programmes and key projects, also operating with large shortfalls, are funded through separate funding portals. UNRWA is a United Nations agency established by the General Assembly in 1949 and mandated to provide assistance and protection to some 5.4 million Palestine refugees registered with UNRWA across its five fields of operation. Its mission is to help Palestine refugees in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, West Bank, including East Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip achieve their full human development potential, pending a just and lasting solution to their plight. UNRWA services encompass education, health care, relief and social services, camp infrastructure and improvement, protection and microfinance.