

UN humanitarian chiefs strongly condemn attacks on medical personnel and facilities by all parties to the Syria conflict

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Note for Media

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Joint statement by WHO Director-General, Dr Margaret Chan; UN Emergency Relief Coordinator, Valerie Amos; Executive Director of the UN Children's Agency, Anthony Lake

6 December 2013

6 December 2013 | New York/Geneva - We strongly condemn attacks on health and any other civilian facilities in Syria and are deeply concerned by the serious implications for patients, health personnel and provision of critical medical supplies.

This brutal conflict continues to result in substantial damage to health facilities across the country. Over 60% of public hospitals have been damaged or are out of service, while a similar proportion of ambulances have been stolen or badly damaged. 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.

Health facilities must be respected and protected in all circumstances - they should not be used for military purposes. 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 during conflict and to permit the supply of vital humanitarian aid, such as medicines, vaccines and medical equipment to reach the most needy communities. 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.

Despite the insecurity and serious access challenges the United Nations and partners have helped vaccinate more than 3.3 million children against measles and polio in recent weeks. Over 8000 women have received reproductive and maternal health services, while medical supplies and training have been provided to ensure that hundreds of thousands of people with chronic health problems are treated.

We and our humanitarian partners continue to call for a halt to the violence and for all those with influence over the parties to urge immediate compliance with international law. And we ask that all our partners increase our common efforts to draw attention to these inhumane acts and to protect innocent women, men and children.

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