

UN High Commissioner for Refugees warns Security Council of “terrifying” humanitarian situation for Syria

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UN High Commissioner for Refugees Antonio Guterres, warned the Security Council today that without an end to the fighting soon, almost half Syria’s 20.8 million population could be in need of humanitarian help by the end of 2013.

In an address to the Council by video-link from Geneva, Guterres said 400,000 refugees had fled Syria in the last seven weeks, bringing the population of Syrians registered as refugees or waiting to be registered to 1,367,413. If current trends continue, he said, then by the end of the year there may be up to 3.5 million Syrian refugees, together with 6.5 million people inside Syria who may become in need of help.

“These figures are terrifying,” he said. “This is not just frightening, it risks becoming simply unsustainable. There is no way to adequately respond to the enormous humanitarian needs these figures represent. And it is difficult to imagine how a nation can endure so much suffering.”

“I know that, as High Commissioner for Refugees, I should confine my remarks to the scope of my mandate,” he added. “But as a citizen of the world, I cannot refrain from asking: Isn’t there any way to stop this fighting, to open the door for a political solution?”

Guterres told the Security Council that humanitarian funding needs had become so urgent that governments would need to look at extraordinary funding mechanisms to avoid the international response capacity becoming overwhelmed. He also warned of the growing pressure the refugee crisis is exerting on countries in the region.

“The first step necessary... is for the international community to provide massive support to the two countries that are most dramatically impacted by the Syrian conflict and the refugee outflow it has caused - Jordan and Lebanon,” he said.

“For Lebanon, the Syrian crisis has become an existential threat. The population has grown by more than 10 per cent if one counts the registered Syrian refugees alone... [In Jordan], like in Lebanon, the Syria crisis has caused a significant drop in revenues from trade, tourism, and foreign investment, compounded by the impact of a very large refugee influx.”

Guterres also noted the huge impact the crisis is having on Turkey, which he said deserved particular recognition for having provided more than \$750 million in direct assistance to over 300,000 Syrian Refugees.

“Helping Syria’s neighbours deal with the human fallout of this terrible conflict is crucial for preserving the stability of the entire region. This is not just another refugee crisis - what happens in Syria and in the neighbouring countries potentially has much wider, even global, implications.”

Earlier on Thursday, Kuwait became the latest country to donate, providing UNHCR with \$110 million for its Syria operations as part of a \$275 million package of funding for UN agencies. Kuwait’s donation is the largest the agency has ever received from a Gulf country and means that UNHCR has now received around 50 per cent of the funds it has requested for Syrian refugees and displaced during the first half of 2013. A new appeal is due in May.

[The full text of High Commissioner Guterres’ address is available here](#)

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