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President Barroso discusses Syria crisis with leading UN officials

Today President José Manuel Barroso met Mr. António Guterres, UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Baroness Valerie Amos, UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, and Mrs. Etharin Cousin, Executive Director of the UN World Food Programme. They discussed the deteriorating situation in Syria, in particular the grave humanitarian picture.

Inside Syria at least 6.8 million people are in need of assistance. The number of internally displaced people now stands at over 4 million and the number of refugees to neighbouring countries is steadily increasing. The EU is the main donor to the Syrian people, with more than €800 million committed both in Syria and its neighbours. The UN Agencies are the EU's main partners in routing this assistance to its recipients. More than 60% of EU's assistance is delivered in partnership with the UN.

President Barroso said after the meeting: "I fear that Syria is now the biggest humanitarian crisis of the last decade. To address the deteriorating situation on the ground, we have further increased our humanitarian support as the largest donor. And we plan to do even more in the future, since this extraordinary situation requires extraordinary means. We are also upgrading our comprehensive help to the other countries in the region, notably Lebanon and Jordan, with our neighbourhood policy and macro-economic tools." The President also stressed: "The EU is strongly backing the current momentum for a peace conference on Syria. Clearly, there is no easy way forward, but a political settlement is still the best possible solution.