



FUELLING THE FIRE

HOW THE UN SECURITY COUNCIL'S
PERMANENT MEMBERS ARE UNDERMINING
THEIR OWN COMMITMENTS ON SYRIA



↑ A Syrian man carrying grocery bags tries to dodge sniper fire as he runs through an alley near a checkpoint manned by the Free Syria Army in the northern city of Aleppo on September 14 2012. Syrian forces used fighter jets and helicopter gunships to pound the city and province of Aleppo, where fierce clashes raged around a military airport, monitors said.

MARCO LONGARI

FUELLING THE FIRE

HOW THE UN SECURITY COUNCIL'S PERMANENT MEMBERS ARE UNDERMINING THEIR OWN COMMITMENTS ON SYRIA

March 2016 marks five years of upheaval and conflict in Syria – conflict that has reduced lives to shadows and cities to rubble. The Syrian government and its allies, as well as armed opposition and extremist groups, bear the primary and direct responsibility for the horrific reality that Syria's civilians face on this grim anniversary. They have targeted civilians, laid siege to cities and towns and denied access to life-saving assistance.

This paper examines what the UNSC demands happen in Syria, the situation since March 2015, and significant actions by the Permanent Members of the UN Security Council. In the first months of 2016 and at time of drafting this paper, some progress has been made in securing greater humanitarian access to those in besieged areas and a cessation of hostilities in parts of the country which has resulted in a significant decrease in civilian casualties. These are important steps that should be recognised and built on, but they remain fragile and limited in the context of the overall deterioration experienced by civilians inside Syria over the last horrendous year of violence.

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COVER PHOTO: A Syrian woman walks past the burning wreckage of a car following reported air strikes by government forces on May 1 2014 in the Halak neighbourhood in northeastern Aleppo. According to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, at least 33 civilians were killed in the attack.

KHALED KHATIB

↓ Syrian girls, carrying school bags provided by UNICEF, walk past the rubble of destroyed buildings on their way home from school on March 7 2015 in al-Shaar neighbourhood, in the rebel-held side of the northern Syrian city of Aleppo.

ZEIN AL-RIFA



REPORT CARD ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF UNSC HUMANITARIAN RESOLUTIONS ON SYRIA IN 2015/2016








In the last year UN Security Council Resolutions have been consistently flouted by parties to the conflict.

And their international backers, including permanent members of the UNSC, are not only failing to ensure implementation of the resolutions but – through inadequate diplomatic pressure, political and military support to their allies, and direct military action – have actively added fuel to the fire of the Syria conflict.

This report card summarizes what the UNSC demands happen in Syria, the situation since March 2015, as well as significant actions by the Permanent Members of the UN Security Council. In the first months of 2016 and at time of drafting of this report, some progress has been made in securing greater humanitarian access to those in besieged areas and a cessation of hostilities in parts of the country which has resulted in a significant decrease in civilian casualties. These are important steps that should be recognised and built on, but they remain fragile and limited in the context of the overall deterioration experienced by civilians inside Syria over the last horrendous year of violence.





PROTECTION OF CIVILIANS

GRADE: DETERIORATION

WHAT THE UNSC DEMANDED IN ITS RESOLUTIONS	THE SITUATION IN 2015/16	WHAT THE UNSC PERMANENT MEMBERS HAVE DONE
<p>UNSCR 2139, 2014 OPERATIONAL PARAGRAPH (OP) 3</p> <p>demands that all parties immediately cease all attacks against civilians, as well as the indiscriminate employment of weapons in populated areas, including shelling and aerial bombardment, such as the use of barrel bombs, and methods of warfare which are of a nature to cause superfluous injury or unnecessary suffering</p>	<p> CONTINUED VIOLATIONS OF LAWS OF WAR BY ALL SIDES, including indiscriminate use of explosive weapons in populated areas, and use of banned cluster munitions</p> <hr/> <p> AT LEAST AN ADDITIONAL 50,000 PEOPLE KILLED SINCE APRIL 2014</p> <hr/> <p> ONE OUT OF EVERY FOUR SCHOOLS REMAINS INACCESSIBLE</p> <hr/> <p> 44 PERCENT INCREASE IN THE NUMBER OF ATTACKS ON HEALTH FACILITIES IN 2015 compared with 2014, making it the worst year since the start of the conflict</p>	<p>RUSSIA</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Air campaign launched at the end of September 2015, against UNSC-listed terrorist organizations and also against some armed opposition groups, across large parts of the country ▶ 7,000 missions flown ▶ Operations reportedly costing an estimated US\$7.5m per day ▶ The attacks have directly hit and damaged civilian infrastructure and reports of thousands of civilian casualties ▶ Russia also continues to transfer arms and ammunition to the Syrian military
<p>UNSCR 2254, 2015 OP13</p> <p>demands that all parties immediately cease any attacks against civilians and civilian objects as such, including attacks against medical facilities and personnel, and any indiscriminate use of weapons, including through shelling and aerial bombardment</p>	<p> AN ADDITIONAL 200,000 HOUSES PARTLY OR COMPLETELY DESTROYED IN 2015 compared with 2014, representing a 20 percent increase from late 2014</p> <hr/> <p> AN ADDITIONAL MILLION-AND-A-HALF PEOPLE IN NEED OF HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE IN 2015 compared with 2014</p> <hr/> <p> CLOSE TO ONE MILLION MORE DISPLACED PEOPLE IN 2015 compared with 2014, either within Syria or to neighbouring countries</p>	<p>USA</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Prioritized military strategy against UNSC-listed terrorist groups, continuing air campaign begun in 2014 ▶ 3,400 bombing raids ▶ Reports of damaged civilian infrastructure and nearly 300 civilian casualties ▶ Direct arms transfers to a range of armed opposition groups ▶ Continues to spend about US\$11.5m per day on airstrikes in both Syria and Iraq <hr/> <p>FRANCE/UK</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ France first launched airstrikes in September 2015 and the UK in December 2015; both targeting areas controlled by UNSC-listed terrorist groups ▶ Combined with operations in Iraq, the UK has spent tens of millions of dollars in operations as of December 2015 ▶ France is believed to have spent more than US\$260m ▶ No reports of civilian casualties <hr/> <p>CHINA</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Not militarily involved in Syria




HUMANITARIAN ACCESS

GRADE: DETERIORATION

WHAT THE UNSC DEMANDED IN ITS RESOLUTIONS	THE SITUATION IN 2015/16	WHAT THE UNSC PERMANENT MEMBERS HAVE DONE
<p>UNSCR 2139, 2014, OP6 demands that all parties [...] allow rapid, safe and unhindered humanitarian access for UN humanitarian agencies and their implementing partners, including across conflict lines and across borders</p>	 <p>SECURITY AND ADMINISTRATIVE BARRIERS TO DELIVERING HUMANITARIAN AID MAINTAINED BY ALL SIDES</p>	<p>RUSSIA</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ <i>Bombing raids continue to be significant barriers to delivering humanitarian assistance across large parts of Syria</i>
<p>UNSCR 2165, 2014, OP6 also decides that all Syrian parties to the conflict shall enable the immediate and unhindered delivery of humanitarian assistance directly to people throughout Syria, [...] including by immediately removing all impediments to the provision of humanitarian assistance</p>	 <p>MORE THAN 4.5 MILLION PEOPLE LIVE IN 147 LOCATIONS WHICH THE UN CONSIDERS TO BE DIFFICULT OR NEAR IMPOSSIBLE TO REACH</p> <p>Access to these and other areas across front lines has actually decreased over the course of 2015 compared with 2014</p>	<p>US/UK/France/China/Russia</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ <i>Along with other members of the ISSG, have called on greater humanitarian access across all of Syria</i>
<p>UNSCR 2268, 2016, OP6 expresses support for the ISSG initiative, [...] to accelerate the urgent delivery of humanitarian aid, with the view towards the full, sustained, and unimpeded access throughout the country</p>	 <p>JUST OVER 10 PERCENT OF REQUESTS FOR INTER-AGENCY AID CONVOYS SUBMITTED TO THE GOVERNMENT OF SYRIA WERE APPROVED AND COMPLETED</p> <p>75 percent of requests made never received a response</p>  <p>AS OF FEBRUARY 2016, OFFICIAL BORDER CROSSINGS INTO AND OUT OF SYRIA, LISTED BY THE UNSC, ARE PARTIALLY CLOSED AND/OR AT SERIOUS RISK OF COMPLETE CLOSURE</p>	

BESIEGED COMMUNITIES AND CEASEFIRES

GRADE: DETERIORATION

WHAT THE UNSC DEMANDED IN ITS RESOLUTIONS	THE SITUATION IN 2015/16	WHAT THE UNSC PERMANENT MEMBERS HAVE DONE
<p>UNSCR 2139, 2014, OP5</p> <p>Calls upon all parties to immediately lift the sieges of populated areas</p>	 <p>THE NUMBER OF PEOPLE LIVING IN AREAS CLASSIFIED BY OCHA AS BESIEGED MORE THAN DOUBLED, FROM 212,000 IN 2014 TO ALMOST 500,000 IN EARLY 2016</p> <p>Less than 1 percent of these people received UN food aid in 2015</p>	<p>RUSSIA</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ <i>Delivered air-drops to ISIS-besieged Deir ez Zour in 2016</i> ▶ <i>Increased its involvement in brokering local ceasefires in 2015, at times acting as guarantors of the deal</i> ▶ <i>In mid-February, Russia and the USA brokered a deal which enabled a temporary and partial cessation of hostilities across much of Syria</i>
<p>UNSCR 2165, 2014, OP7</p> <p>Notes in this regard the role that ceasefire agreements that are consistent with humanitarian principles and international humanitarian law could play to facilitate the delivery of humanitarian assistance</p>	 <p>AS OF 25 FEBRUARY 2016, AFTER DISCUSSIONS IN A HUMANITARIAN TASKFORCE SET UP BY THE ISSG, AID HAD BEEN DELIVERED TO ALMOST 110,000 PEOPLE IN SIX DIFFERENT BESIEGED LOCATIONS WITHIN SYRIA</p>	
<p>UNSCR 2268, 2016, OP1</p> <p>Endorses in full the Joint Statement of the United States and the Russian Federation, as Co-Chairs of the ISSG, on Cessation of Hostilities in Syria</p>	 <p>MORE LOCAL CEASEFIRES WERE BROKERED BY WARRING PARTIES, BUT THIS DID NOT RESULT IN SUSTAINED AND UNHINDERED ACCESS</p> <p>A DEAL ON PROVISIONAL CESSATION OF HOSTILITIES CAME INTO EFFECT 26 FEBRUARY 2016, WITH WIDESPREAD DOUBTS ABOUT WHETHER IT WILL HOLD</p> <p>The agreement does not apply to areas where UNSC-listed terrorist groups operate</p>	<p>US/UK/France/CHINA/RUSSIA</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ <i>Along with other members of the ISSG has called for sieges to be lifted and cessation of hostilities</i> ▶ <i>Any ceasefires will not include groups listed as terrorist organizations by the UNSC</i>

1 INTRODUCTION

This month marks five years of war in Syria – war that has reduced lives to shadows and cities to rubble. The Syrian government and its allies, as well as armed opposition and extremist groups, bear the primary and direct responsibility for the horrific reality Syria’s civilians face on this grim anniversary. They have targeted civilians, laid siege to cities and towns and denied access to life-saving assistance.

Compounding this catastrophe, several UNSC and International Syria Support Group (ISSG) members – specifically Russia, UK, USA and France, but also Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Iran and others – intensified their military engagement in Syria. To varying degrees, these states – which should play a key role in ending the suffering in Syria – are actively contributing to that very suffering. The last year was the most desperate since the start of the conflict, with the recently intensified Russian engagement having a particularly negative impact on civilians.

In mid-February 2016, the ISSG issued a statement committing to ensure a nationwide cessation of hostilities and access to humanitarian assistance.¹ The February ISSG statement referenced UN Security Council resolutions (UNSCR) on Syria. Since the conflict began in 2011, there have been at least 16 resolutions, 11 Presidential Statements and 37 press statements. The UN Secretary-General (UNSG) has presented more than 54 reports to the Security Council.² Together, these have called for an end to indiscriminate attacks, a halt to the violence, increased humanitarian access, the lifting of sieges and a cessation of hostilities, among other demands.³ For five years, these obligations have consistently been flouted by parties to the conflict, and their international backers. Many governments, including permanent members of the UNSC, are not only failing to ensure UNSCRs are implemented but – through inadequate diplomatic pressure, political and military support to their allies, and direct military action – are actively adding fuel to the fire of the Syria conflict.

In the weeks following the February ISSG statement, hospitals, schools and homes have been bombed, scores of civilians killed, and tens of thousands of people displaced, amidst a dramatic escalation in international tensions.⁴ While new aid convoys reached besieged communities, bringing some temporary relief to hundreds of thousands of civilians, huge swathes of Syria remain without adequate assistance as aid agencies continue to be blocked, attacked or harassed by all the warring sides. On 26 February 2016, the UNSC, under resolution 2268, endorsed the ISSG deal to cease hostilities for two weeks and create the conditions for a lasting ceasefire.⁵ However, Special Envoy Staffan De Mistura noted that there is much work still to do for

THE SYRIAN PEOPLE WONDER WHY THE WORLD IS SILENT, AND ASK:

“WHY DOES THE WORLD PUNISH US WITH ITS SILENCE? WHAT DID WE DO WRONG TO BE FORCED TO WITNESS ALL OF THIS MURDER AND THE DESTRUCTION OF OUR LIVES, HOMES AND OUR DREAMS?”

AISHA, 36 YEARS OLD, AID WORKER AND FORMER ENGLISH TEACHER

the agreement to be implemented and stressed that there would be no shortage of attempts to undermine the process.⁶

Resolution 2268 offers renewed hope, but the UNSC and ISSG must decide whether they are committed to ending the regional and international catastrophe, or whether they continue to act in ways that contribute to its escalation.

↓ A woman walks pushing a pram between the rubble of destroyed buildings in the besieged rebel bastion of Duma on December 13 2014. Duma, a rebel bastion northeast of Damascus, has been under government siege for more than a year, with residents facing dwindling food and medical supplies.

ABD DOUMANY



2 THE WORST YEAR YET FOR CIVILIANS IN SYRIA

Two years have passed since the adoption of UNSCR 2139,⁷ the first to directly address the humanitarian situation in Syria, including the protection of Syrian civilians. Since then, and particularly over the last 12 months, the suffering has only worsened.


While the figures have been difficult to verify and range from 150,000⁸ to 370,000,⁹ UN estimates released in August 2015 suggest that at least 250,000 people have been killed since the beginning of the conflict.¹⁰ The UN estimate is up by more than 50,000 compared with April 2014.¹¹

Well over one million people have been injured.¹² Many of the casualties are civilians subjected to deliberate attacks, notably by the use of explosive weapons in populated areas.¹³

In 2015 an additional million-and-a-half people required urgent humanitarian assistance and close to one million more became displaced within Syria or to neighbouring countries. Many thousands more made the perilous journey to Europe.¹⁴ Over the past five years on average, 50 Syrian families have been uprooted every hour.¹⁵ More than 12 million people in Syria still do not have access to clean water and nearly 9 million do not have enough to eat.¹⁶



At the same time, after having admitted large numbers of refugees, countries neighbouring Syria have largely closed their borders to people fleeing the war. Hundreds of thousands of people are living in camps, with host communities, or out in the open near or on Syria's borders, often in terrible conditions and without access to adequate assistance.¹⁷ This includes more than 35,000 people trapped trying to enter Jordan¹⁸ and more than 70,000 heading for the Turkish border since the start of February 2016.¹⁹

SYRIA IN 2015: AFTER FIVE YEARS OF WAR

 EACH FIGURE REPRESENTS 50,000 PEOPLE



  AT LEAST 250,000 PEOPLE HAVE BEEN KILLED IN THE WAR.

  IN 2015, 1.5 MILLION PEOPLE REQUIRED URGENT HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE

  NEARLY 1 MILLION MORE PEOPLE WERE DISPLACED WITHIN SYRIA OR TO NEIGHBOURING COUNTRIES IN 2015. THOUSANDS MORE MADE THE JOURNEY TO EUROPE.

CIVILIANS UNDER FIRE: INDISCRIMINATE ATTACKS IN 2015

The UNSC has repeatedly demanded that all parties to the conflict respect international law and desist from attacks against civilians and civilian infrastructure.

Most recently, the ISSG called for an end to any indiscriminate use of weapons and reaffirmed the importance of UNSCR 2258, in which the UNSC expressed outrage at the escalating level of violence and ongoing attacks on schools, medical facilities, homes and water networks.²⁰

Seven UNSC resolutions adopted since the start of the conflict have strongly condemned violations committed against children. However, the situation for children in Syria has continued to deteriorate. Restrictions on access to many areas mean that the total number of attacks on schools in 2015 is unknown. Since 2011, however, more than 4,000 schools, (one in four in the country),²¹ have had to close as a direct result of the fighting; half of all attacks on schools worldwide have occurred in Syria in recent years.²² In just one of many recent tragic examples, in mid-December 2015, airstrikes hit a girls' school in Duma, killing 19 civilians, including 15 students.²³ Despite calls from world leaders to prevent a 'lost generation', these attacks have left more than two million children in Syria out of school; an increase of 400,000 children compared with 2014.²⁴

Meanwhile, 2015 saw the highest number of attacks on hospitals in a single year since the conflict began, with a significant increase from 2014.²⁵ Physicians for Human Rights documented at least 112 attacks on medical facilities,²⁶ an average of one every three days during 2015. That does not include several recent incidents, such as the four health facilities and a school hit from the air in mid-February 2016,²⁷ killing at least 14 people. This attack came just days after the ISSG declared there should be a cessation of hostilities and announced renewed efforts to protect civilians. Attacks on hospitals continue to have tragic consequences for health workers, with at least 700 killed since the start of the conflict.²⁸ Nearly two-thirds of hospitals have been destroyed or are only partly functional as a result of the five years of conflict.²⁹ Hospitals continue to be built and rebuilt underground, in basements and caves, to protect medical staff and patients from the effects of aerial and explosive attacks.

Homes have also been attacked in ever greater numbers over the past year. According to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA), 2015 saw an additional 200,000 houses partly or completely destroyed, representing a 20 percent increase from late 2014.³⁰ More than 1.2 million homes have been damaged and 400,000 completely destroyed since the onset of the conflict.³¹

I WAS IN THE FIRST GRADE
WHEN I HAD TO LEAVE
MY SCHOOL BACK HOME.
ONE DAY ARMED MEN
CAME INTO THE SCHOOL
AND STARTED SHOOTING,
AND AFTER THAT
MY MOTHER SAID
I COULD NOT GO TO
SCHOOL ANYMORE.

NAGHAM, 9, FROM ALEPPO

IN 2015,
112 HOSPITALS AND
CLINICS IN SYRIA
WERE ATTACKED.

THAT'S
THE MOST IN
FIVE YEARS OF WAR.



ACCESS DENIED: THE HUMANITARIAN ACCESS CHALLENGE IN 2015

The need for unfettered humanitarian access has been reiterated by the UNSC throughout 2015, and most recently in the commitments expressed by the ISSG in mid-February 2016.

Yet, it has never been more challenging for civilians to access aid.³²

More than 4.5 million people³³ live in 147 locations³⁴ which the UN considers to be difficult or near impossible to reach.³⁵ Access to these and other areas actually decreased over the course of 2015, with fewer inter-agency aid convoys able to cross between territories controlled by different actors, compared with 2014.³⁶ For example, only ten convoys have been approved to cross conflict lines into Eastern Ghouta in the last four years.

During 2015, the Syrian government continued to place limits on the work of aid agencies. While some progress was made, NGOs and UN agencies still faced restrictions when travelling within Syria, and for opening adequate numbers of field offices outside of the capital or working with local NGOs.³⁷ Many agencies face ongoing problems obtaining visas for their staff, severely limiting aid operations that can be implemented from Damascus; although some NGOs have noted relative improvements compared with previous years. The number of UN staff visas rejected by the Syrian government increased significantly over the past year: 44 visas were rejected in 2015 compared with 28 in 2014.³⁸ However, OCHA reports significant improvement in visa approval rates in the final quarter of 2015, with 95 percent of requests for visas approved within agreed timeframes each month.³⁹

Of even greater concern is the restriction on independent, impartial and timely humanitarian operations across the country. Since the beginning of 2015, 113 requests for inter-agency aid convoys have been submitted to the Government of Syria, of which only 13 – just over 10 percent – were approved and completed.⁴⁰ A further 15 were initially approved, but are either still in preparation or blocked because of a lack of authorization by Syrian security forces or because the parties to the conflict could not guarantee safe passage. Eighty requests – almost 75 percent – had not received an answer at all from the authorities three months after the requests were made.⁴¹

IN 2015, 113 REQUESTS FOR AID CONVOYS WERE SUBMITTED TO THE SYRIAN GOVERNMENT.



ONLY 11% WERE APPROVED AND REACHED SYRIANS IN NEED.

WHEN SYRIANS SAY GOODBYE TO THEIR FAMILIES NOW, THEY KNOW IT MAY BE FOR THE LAST TIME. THEY KNOW THAT THEY MAY NOT BE ABLE TO GET HOME AGAIN, OR EVEN IF THEY DO, THEIR HOUSE MAY BE DESTROYED.

AYHAM, 26 YEARS OLD, AID WORKER AND FORMER FINANCE OFFICER FROM ALEPPO

With the adoption of UNSCR 2165 in July 2014 (renewed most recently in December 2015), UN agencies were authorized to provide assistance from countries neighbouring Syria without seeking permission from the Syrian government. As a result, the number of UN cross-border operations significantly increased in 2015 – although UN assistance rarely included the provision of humanitarian services, such as health and education. The overall monthly average number of trucks increased by approximately 260 percent in 2015 compared with the previous year.⁴² Between January and December 2015, 124 consignments, using 3,919 trucks, delivered humanitarian assistance from the Bab al-Hawa and Bab al-Salam border crossings.⁴³ In addition, almost 10,000 truckloads of humanitarian supplies from international NGOs and local aid organizations were delivered from Turkey during 2015.⁴⁴ Cross-border aid operations from Jordan have been more modest. Between July 2014 and January 2016, close to 1,200 trucks reached more than two million beneficiaries in southern Syria.⁴⁵

Bureaucratic hurdles in countries neighbouring Syria, combined with intensified fighting in and around borders, continue to hamper the delivery of NGO cross-border assistance.⁴⁶ As of February 2016, the four formal border crossings into and out of Syria named in UNSC resolutions are either partly closed and/or at risk of closure due to increased fighting. Turkish authorities severely limit the number of aid workers allowed to cross between Syria and southern Turkey.⁴⁷ In Jordan, no Syrian aid workers can cross from Syria, and INGOs continue to experience limitations on the range of Syrian aid organizations they can work with, impacting on their ability to help more people inside Syria.⁴⁸

One of the most significant barriers to aid delivery over the past year has been the deteriorating security situation and attacks on aid workers in Syria. The recent increase in Russian air strikes has also made aid delivery much more difficult across large parts of the country. Armed opposition groups and government forces continue to prevent humanitarian agencies from crossing checkpoints. Aid workers continue to be at risk of being caught in the crossfire or attacked, kidnapped or arbitrarily detained. As of January 2016, 34 UN staff members⁴⁹ were detained or missing, signifying a 10 percent increase from January 2015.⁵⁰ Since March 2011, 81 humanitarian workers have been killed; 15 of them since 1 January 2015.⁵¹ The true number of Syrian NGO workers killed may be considerably higher. In one of the most serious developments over the past year, groups listed by the UNSC as terrorist organizations have been responsible for deliberately blocking aid to areas under their control. This has left millions of civilians without adequate assistance.

**WE ALWAYS HAVE
TO BE CAREFUL.
WHEN I CROSS
CHECKPOINTS,
I DON'T TELL GUARDS
THAT I AM
AN AID WORKER.
WHEN WE DO OUR
DISTRIBUTIONS
WE HAVE TO MAKE SURE
WE DON'T CREATE A
CROWD THAT COULD
BECOME A TARGET FOR
ARMED GROUPS.**

**SYRIAN AID WORKER,
DERAA, SOUTHERN SYRIA**

A man reacts to the destruction in the northern Syrian city of Aleppo on February 16 2014. The death toll in nearly three years of conflict in Syria has risen to more than 140,000 people including nearly 50,000 civilians, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said. *AFP* →

THE IMPACT OF AIR ATTACKS AND SHELLING ON AID WORK

Air attacks and shelling have long been among the many challenges faced by humanitarian organizations working in Syria, especially in cities like Aleppo. For Syrian aid agencies performing most of the work on the ground, air attacks and shelling put enormous psychological pressure on staff.

Worse still, civilian infrastructure supported by aid agencies often becomes the target of attack. This includes sites used to distribute essential humanitarian items like food, blankets and hygiene kits. Aid workers are forced to regularly change the locations where distributions take place to better protect civilians.

Combatants also routinely attack civilian infrastructure. In late November, an airstrike on the Alkhfsa water station temporarily cut off the supply of drinking water to 3.5 million people in Aleppo across both government control and non-government control areas.⁵²

FROM SYRIA'S BORDER WITH TURKEY TO THE AID DISTRIBUTION POINTS – ATTACKS HAVE CONTRIBUTED TO DAMAGE AND DESTRUCTION TO AID TRUCKS, WAREHOUSES AND HUMANITARIAN DISTRIBUTION SITES – **OFTEN MAKING OUR WORK NEAR IMPOSSIBLE.**

SYRIAN AID WORKER, ALEPPO



SIEGES: STRANGLING COMMUNITIES IN 2015

Many of those worst affected by the humanitarian access restrictions live in areas the UN defines as besieged communities.⁵³ In areas under siege, civilians are deliberately deprived of aid and basic services, including water, electricity, food and medical care.⁵⁴ Over the course of the past year, the number of people living under siege has more than doubled from 212,000 people⁵⁵ residing in 11 areas at the end of 2014 to almost 487,000 people in 18 locations as of February 2016.⁵⁶

Access to besieged communities has only become more difficult. On average during 2015, the UN reached 3.5 percent of besieged populations with health assistance and 0.7 percent with food assistance.⁵⁷ 15 of these locations are controlled by the Syrian government. Of the remainder, one area is besieged by ISIS and two are besieged by Ahrar al Sham and al Nusra. By far the largest besieged community is Deir ez Zor, where some two hundred thousand people are trapped by ISIS. This represents nearly half the total number of people living under siege in Syria according to OCHA.

Several NGOs working in Syria state that the UN underestimates the number of people trapped in besieged locations. In February 2015, the Syrian American Medical Society estimated that there were over 640,000 people under siege in Syria. In January 2016, Pax and The Syria Institute estimated that more than one million people are living under siege.⁵⁸ Many locations, such as the southern Damascus suburbs of Al-Qadam, Yelda, Babbila, and Beit Sahm, are considered “hard to reach” but excluded from the list of besieged communities under UN criteria, despite the population experiencing severe and long-term restrictions to their freedom of movement and access to aid. The town of Madaya, which experienced deliberate starvation, was likewise considered “hard to reach” but excluded from OCHA’s list of besieged areas until it became the focus of global media attention at the start of 2016.⁵⁹ In February 2016, the UN put in place a new system to better monitor the needs of the besieged populations. This includes areas not on the UN list, but at risk of becoming besieged.

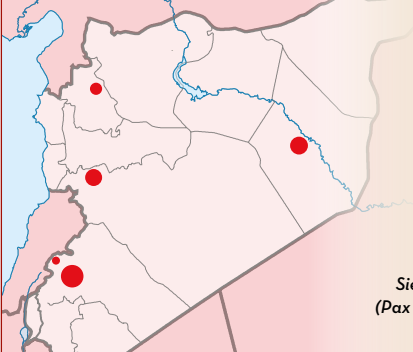
Lifting sieges has become the focus of the ISSG. In its February 2016 statement, the group stated that it expects sustained and simultaneous delivery of assistance to begin in Deir ez Zour, Fua, Kefrayah, rural Damascus, Madaya, Moadamiyeh and Kafr Batna. By 25 February, after discussions of a humanitarian taskforce set up by the ISSG, aid had been delivered to almost 110,000 people and 200 trucks had reached six different locations within Syria.⁶⁰

**MY FAMILY AND I HAVE
HAD TO FLEE OUR HOME.
THE WAR HAS DESTROYED
OUR HOPES AND DREAMS.**

**25-YEAR-OLD FORMER STUDENT
FROM QUNEITRA PROVINCE**









This represents welcome progress and shows it is possible to restore aid deliveries to besieged areas if there is sufficient pressure by international governments and the UN. However, real benefit to those living in these areas will require sustained and regular humanitarian access.

The UN is unable to maintain a permanent presence in besieged areas and the access negotiations have not included provisions for the evacuations of civilians, including for urgent medical treatment.



**SIEGE HOTSPOTS
FEBRUARY 2016**

Map adapted from
Siege Watch, February 2016
(Pax for Peace, Syria Institute)

NO MEDICINE 	NO WATER 	NO ELECTRICITY 
NO CONTACT 	LIVING UNDER SIEGE	NO FUEL 
NO FOOD 	NO WAY OUT 	NO DOCTORS 

THE UN ESTIMATES ALMOST 487,000 PEOPLE ARE LIVING UNDER SIEGE.

OTHER ORGANISATIONS STATE THAT **MORE THAN 1,000,000 PEOPLE ARE LIVING IN BESIEGED COMMUNITIES.**

THIS CONSERVATIVE NUMBER HAS **MORE THAN DOUBLED OVER THE PAST YEAR.**

IN AREAS UNDER SIEGE, CIVILIANS ARE DELIBERATELY DEPRIVED OF AID AND BASIC SERVICES, INCLUDING WATER, ELECTRICITY, FOOD AND MEDICAL CARE.

Many aid convoys still do not have approval, and some essential aid items have not been allowed by the Syrian government. For example, 87 aid trucks reached 22,000 beneficiaries in Moadamiyeh in mid and late February 2016.

However, the delivery of surgical and trauma kits and other health items was not approved by the Syrian authorities. Aid convoys to locations in urgent need of assistance such as in Rural Homs and Rural Hama, Al Tal and Aleppo have still not been authorized by the Syrian government. A World Food Programme aid air-drop into Deir Ez Zor on 24 February faced technical difficulties and the delivery was unsuccessful.⁶¹

THE SIEGE OF YARMOUK

The Palestinian camp of Yarmouk on the outskirts of Damascus has been besieged by government forces and their allied armed groups for more than two-and-a-half years.⁶² Residents of Yarmouk are also restricted by checkpoints manned by armed opposition groups, as well as by al Nusra and ISIS. Since July 2013, delivery of aid to Yarmouk has been sporadic at best and by November 2015, 182 people had died as a result of issues related to the siege,⁶³ including starvation and lack of medical care.

Syrian government forces and their allies prevent basic food items from entering the camp, such as bread, flour, sugar, infant milk, fruit and vegetables. The main source of water for Yarmouk has been cut off since September 2014, forcing residents to use polluted underground water sources that has resulted in epidemics of typhoid and other diseases.⁶⁴ OCHA removed Yarmouk from the list of besieged communities in July 2015, putting it back in February 2016. Yet, the last time the UN was able to enter Yarmouk to deliver assistance was 28 March 2015.⁶⁵ Between 6,000 and 12,000 people are estimated to still live in Yarmouk.

Other communities under siege, including those encircled by armed opposition groups or UNSC-listed terrorist organizations, in Fouah, Kafraya and Deir ez Zour, face similar challenges.

NO REAL RESPITE: THE FALSE PROMISE OF LOCAL CEASEFIRES IN 2015

The UNSC has repeatedly called on the parties to the conflict to agree on localized ceasefires, truces and other measures to allow humanitarian agencies access to all areas in Syria. Most recently, in February 2016, the ISSG agreed to work to implement a nationwide cessation of hostilities, including the creation of a UN-authorized ceasefire monitoring mission, however, excluding areas where ISIS, al Nusra or any other groups the ISSG deem to be terrorist organizations operate.⁶⁶

This agreement, endorsed by the UNSC in resolution 2268 and effective from 26 February 2016, has been met with widespread scepticism.⁶⁷

Ceasefires have never been more urgent, and over the past year have offered respite to some areas in Syria. Pauses in the fighting have in several cases brought temporary relief from aerial bombardments and daily mortar fire, and allowed the delivery of humanitarian assistance to some areas in Homs,⁶⁸ some suburbs of Damascus⁶⁹ and towns in western Syria in the Zabadani area. In a rare success, in the Damascus suburbs of Qaboun and Barzeh, a ceasefire reportedly led to the lifting of the siege. Ceasefires have often been motivated by shared local interests. For example, restoring basic services, such as water, electricity and roads, has motivated opposing sides to collaborate, at least temporarily.

However, ceasefire negotiations have also come at a great cost to civilians, and the use of aid access as a bargaining chip is of serious concern. Some ceasefires have resulted from continuous shelling and, at times, sieges and starvation tactics used to pressure those in control of the areas to surrender. Others are used to further military goals,⁷⁰ which can put civilians elsewhere in Syria at greater risk when forces are redeployed.⁷¹ As factions negotiate ceasefires, humanitarian access, freedom of movement or evacuations of civilians often remain restricted or even prohibited.⁷²

There was an increased involvement of international powers in brokering ceasefire deals in 2015.⁷³ In theory, this could provide a guarantor for the agreements.⁷⁴ In practice, however, these deals often lacked transparency, with outside powers prioritizing their own political and security objectives over the needs and rights of civilians.

**SOME CEASEFIRES
HAVE RESULTED FROM
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AND STARVATION TACTICS
USED TO PRESSURE THOSE
IN CONTROL OF THE
AREAS TO SURRENDER.**

On 23 February 2016, the Syrian government and some armed groups accepted a temporary 'cessation of hostilities' deal brokered by the United States and Russia. For this agreement to have a meaningful and positive impact, the ISSG must maintain serious pressure on all parties to permanently end the fighting on the ground, ensure the ceasefire is sufficiently monitored by a UN presence, and take steps to link the deal to local communities and those committed to improving the lives of civilians.

THE 'FOUR TOWNS' CEASEFIRE AGREEMENT

In September 2015, a ceasefire agreement covering Zabadani, Fuaa, Kafraya and Madaya towns and 10 villages in western Syria was negotiated by armed actors and with the involvement of Iran, Turkey and others.⁷⁵ The agreement not only included an end to military operations, but also detailed evacuation plans for fighters and their families from all sides.⁷⁶

While the deal has enabled the delivery of humanitarian assistance, including food and medical supplies, to the four towns covered by the agreement, this has been sporadic and largely insufficient.

From the time of the agreement until January 2016, aid had only been delivered twice: once in October 2015 and again in January 2016, amid a global public outcry. By then, at least 23 people had reportedly starved to death inside Madaya.⁷⁷ In the same period, Fuaa and Kafraya - besieged by Ahrar al Sham and al Nusra - saw increased reports of shortages of basic commodities and the closure of the hospital due to lack of supplies.⁷⁸ Following the ISSG statement in mid-February 2016, more aid convoys have entered these areas, as noted above.

As of mid-February 2016, civilians in locations covered by the Four Town ceasefire deal are still not allowed to travel in and out of these areas freely; only a few have been evacuated and people are still not able to access sustained humanitarian assistance or medical care.

↓ A Syrian man and his children carry sacks of wheat and aid, provided by the World Food Programme (WFP), in Kafr Batna, in the rebel-held Eastern Ghouta area, on the outskirts of the capital Damascus on March 1, 2016. Aid workers made the first delivery of desperately needed assistance since the start of Syria's fragile ceasefire, as an international task force met to try to bolster the truce. *AMER ALMOHIBANY*



THE IMPACT OF WAR

The cumulative effects of five years of violence have caused enormous harm. The war has fundamentally damaged the Syrian economy and society.

	PRE-WAR EARLY 2011 OR BEFORE	2015	IMPACT
LIFE EXPECTANCY AT BIRTH ⁷⁹	70.5 years	55.4 years	15.1 years 21.5% decrease
IMMUNISATION COVERAGE ⁸⁰	90%	Under 60%	Over 33% decrease
AVERAGE MONTHLY INCOME ⁸¹	US\$600	US\$100	\$US500 (150,000 SYP) 83% decrease
UNEMPLOYMENT RATE ⁸²	8% before 2011	14.9% in 2011	52.9% 2.91 million persons
POVERTY RATE ⁸³	35.2% in 2007	85.2% 67% live in extreme poverty ⁸⁴	142% increase

3 A YEAR OF ESCALATION: NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE VIOLENCE AND SUFFERING IN SYRIA

The pervasive violence and insecurity, indiscriminate attacks against civilians, denial of assistance and collapse of services is part of a deliberate strategy by parties to the conflict.

However, they have been able to carry out such actions because members of the UNSC and ISSG failed to put sufficient pressure on their allies on the ground, and have either ignored or deliberately undermined their own statements and commitments.

Worse still, four of the permanent members of the UNSC have increasingly chosen to take a more direct military role in Syria, with varying degrees of direct consequences for the civilian population and escalation of the conflict.

THE SYRIAN GOVERNMENT AND RUSSIA

Syrian and international human rights groups report that the Syrian government is responsible for the majority of attacks harming civilians.⁸⁵

As referenced by the UNSG in his monthly reports, the use of cluster munitions and other explosive weapons by the Syrian military has continued throughout the past year,⁸⁶ with indiscriminate or disproportionate aerial bombings and ground attacks.⁸⁷ For example, in his first report in 2016, the UNSG noted the alleged use of barrel bombs by government forces in December 2015, resulting in the deaths of 76 individuals, including 12 children.⁸⁸

The Syrian government's military operations continue to be supported by Russia, a permanent member of the UNSC.⁸⁹

According to the Russian Ministry of Defence, between September 2015 and February 2016, the Russian air force flew more than 7,000 missions in Syria, often directly supporting Syrian ground offensives. In December 2015, for example, intensive fighting in parts of northern Aleppo governorate, supported by Syrian and Russian air strikes, hit areas close to the Turkish-Syrian border. This included several villages near the Bab al-Hawa and Bab al-Salam border crossings used by aid workers.⁹⁰ The Russian government is reportedly spending up to US\$7.5m per day⁹¹ on its military campaign in support of the Syrian government (compared to the \$9m total offered for humanitarian aid last year – just 0.32 percent of Russia's military spending). In addition, 2015 saw the Russian government provide significant support in the form of military equipment.⁹²

The Russian military has been responsible for damaging civilian infrastructure from the air. In his December 2015 report to the UNSC, the UNSG cited allegations that 2,300 civilians were killed by Russian air strikes during November 2015 alone.⁹³ A December 2015 series of air attacks in Idlib city, attributed to Russia, reportedly killed 95 civilians and injured 170 others.⁹⁴

Human Rights Watch documented the use of internationally banned cluster munitions on at least 20 occasions between the beginning of Russia's military intervention at the end of September and December 2015.⁹⁵ At least 14 more cluster munition attacks in joint sorties by Syrian and Russian forces were documented between the end of January and early February 2016, killing at least 37 civilians.⁹⁶

THE RUSSIAN GOVERNMENT IS REPORTEDLY SPENDING UP TO US\$7.5M PER DAY ON ITS MILITARY CAMPAIGN COMPARED TO THE \$9M TOTAL OFFERED FOR HUMANITARIAN AID LAST YEAR – JUST 0.32 PERCENT OF RUSSIA'S MILITARY SPENDING.

The Russian Federation denies it uses cluster munitions, and has either failed to respond to credible reports of civilian deaths as a result of their operations, or denied that civilians were killed.⁹⁷

In addition to Russia, the Syrian government continued to receive significant support from **Iran** and its ally, the Lebanon-based armed group **Hezbollah**, as well as militia fighters from Iraq. Iranian military advisors and Hezbollah fighters have been heavily involved in military actions supporting the Syrian government in 2015 and early 2016.⁹⁸

PARADOXICALLY,
THE INTERNATIONAL AND
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THAT ARE OSTENSIBLY
PUSHING FOR A PEACEFUL
SOLUTION TO THE WAR
ARE THE SAME THAT
CONTINUE TO FEED THE
MILITARY ESCALATION.

**REPORT OF THE INDEPENDENT
INTERNATIONAL COMMISSION
OF INQUIRY OF THE SYRIAN
ARAB REPUBLIC, 11 FEBRUARY 2016**

WATER AS A WEAPON OF WAR

During 2015, water was cut off to major cities such as Aleppo (54 days), Salamyeh (30 days) and Damascus (9 days), affecting approximately 5 million people in Syria.⁹⁹ Many more have experienced complete cuts in water supplies, such as in As Sweida and Deir ez Zour¹⁰⁰ and Yarmouk.

Aleppo, a city of more than two million people, experienced a cut in water supply for more than three weeks after al Nusra captured the city's main water station.¹⁰¹ Residents of Aleppo were forced to rely on untreated groundwater from wells or other emergency water supply, exposing them to the risk of diarrhoea, typhoid, hepatitis, and other diseases.¹⁰²

As of August 2015, UNICEF had recorded 18 deliberate cuts to water supply in Syria during 2015 alone.¹⁰³

Eastern Ghouta, Damascus, has been under siege by government forces. Cut off from both electricity and running water, these children are filling up their containers with well water, December 25 2014
ANADOLU AGENCY



ARMED OPPOSITION GROUPS

The UNSG’s reports noted several cases each month of indiscriminate attacks by several different armed opposition groups, which continue to kill, injure and displace civilians.¹⁰⁴

International human rights organizations have highlighted groups who could be responsible for war crimes and are committing serious human rights abuses.¹⁰⁵

For example, rocket and mortar attacks, and shelling in Damascus city by armed opposition groups at the start of December 2015 allegedly hit a school, a hospital, sports facilities and other civilian areas, killing 21 people and injuring more than 100, according to UN reports and the Syrian government.¹⁰⁶

Arms investigators noted that the use of artillery by armed opposition groups was increasingly ‘widespread and capable of massive destruction’, including in densely populated areas.¹⁰⁷

As just one example, the UN Commission of Inquiry noted that government-held areas of Aleppo city face ‘regular bombardment’ by armed opposition groups.¹⁰⁸ Armed opposition groups continued to receive financial and military support from the USA, Turkey and Gulf countries in 2015 (see below).

IN THE FUTURE I WISH
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I ALSO WISH THAT NO
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ALIA, 9 YEARS OLD, WHO FLED HER
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A YEAR MOVING WITH HER FAMILY
FROM PLACE TO PLACE TRYING TO
FIND SOMEWHERE SAFE TO STAY

AID AND RESETTLEMENT PLEDGES BY UNSC MEMBERS

Governments have used significant resources to scale up military engagement in Syria, and have been able to come together on issues where they perceive their interests to be at stake, particularly around counter-terrorism. This has not always been the case for issues related to the protection of civilians, access and financial or resettlement contributions to the humanitarian response.

Several successive UNSC resolutions have urged all Member States to provide increased, flexible and predictable funding as well as enhanced resettlement efforts. However, the 2015 UN appeals for Syria and the region were just 57 percent funded and only some 36 percent of UNHCR’s target for resettlement has been met. As of 1 March, the 2016 UN humanitarian appeals are only 2 percent funded – though pledges made by many governments at the Supporting Syria and the Region conference in London February 4

are expected to dramatically increase this figure.¹⁰⁹ There are 170,911 places have been pledged to refugees from Syria as of early February 2016;¹¹⁰ less than half of UNHCR-identified needs. Only a fraction of this number have actually made it to third countries.

The record of Security Council members themselves is mixed. In 2015, Russia contributed only US\$6.7m to the UN-led humanitarian appeals and has not pledged to resettle any Syrian refugees. The US contributed US\$1.58bn to the appeals. It also pledged to resettle at least 10,000 Syrian refugees in 2016 and more in the future.¹¹¹ Of the permanent members of the UNSC, only the UK has contributed more in humanitarian funding – US\$634.9m – than it spends on military engagement. However, it only pledged to resettle 20,000 Syrian refugees by 2020. France, which has contributed US\$55.6m to the appeals, pledged to resettle 1,000 Syrian refugees. Finally, China has not contributed anything to the humanitarian appeals nor pledged to resettle any Syrian refugees.¹¹²

THE UNITED STATES AND ALLIES

The US-led coalition against the ISIS and other UNSC-listed terrorist groups – a coalition which includes Australia, Bahrain, France, United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates and Turkey – has conducted more than 3,400 bombing raids in Syria.¹¹³

More than 37,000 bombs have been dropped on Syria and Iraq since the inception of the coalition campaign targeting ISIS,¹¹⁴ and the US has targeted listed terrorist groups operating in civilian areas. Despite the scale of its intervention, the US claims that only 16 civilians have been killed and nine injured across the two countries.¹¹⁵ The UNSG has cited reports by Syrian human rights organizations that almost 300 people have been killed in US-led airstrikes.¹¹⁶

The British government, which began its military intervention in Syria in December 2015, has claimed that their air strikes against ISIS have resulted in no civilian casualties.¹¹⁷

These air operations required significant investment. The UK is said to be spending tens of millions of pounds in Iraq and Syria,¹¹⁸ including in support of Syrian armed opposition groups,¹¹⁹ and recently announced that it intends to spend £2bn more (almost US\$2.8bn) to target ISIS.¹²⁰ France is spending approximately €237.5m (US\$264.4m)¹²¹ on its military campaign. In the course of 2015, the USA spent US\$11.5m a day on its bombing raids in Syria and Iraq.¹²² The US also directly transfers weapons to armed groups inside Syria.¹²³ In fiscal year (FY) 2015, the USA spent US\$521m on security and police assistance in Syria, largely on ‘train-and-equip’ programmes with the stated aim of combatting ISIS. In addition, the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) runs a programme funded by Gulf nations to provide weapons to armed opposition groups.¹²⁴

Turkey, a member of the US coalition, has repeatedly called for the imposition of a buffer zone in northern Syria¹²⁵ in order to return refugees to Syria.¹²⁶ Turkey also reportedly provided significant support, including transit and arms and ammunition, to armed opposition groups and has itself become militarily active in Syria.¹²⁷ Since 13 February 2016, Turkey has repeatedly shelled Kurdish positions across the border in Syria,¹²⁸ as tensions grow between Turkey and the Kurdish YPG operating in northern Syria.

Finally, another US ally, **Israel**, also engaged militarily in Syria, conducting several air strikes in 2015, according to the Israeli government.¹²⁹

IN THE COURSE OF 2015, THE USA SPENT US\$11.5M A DAY ON ITS BOMBING RAIDS IN SYRIA AND IRAQ. THE US ALSO DIRECTLY TRANSFERS WEAPONS TO ARMED GROUPS INSIDE SYRIA.

UNSC-LISTED TERRORIST GROUPS

The issue that has most clearly united the UNSC is counter-terrorism, with the adoption of several UNSC resolutions addressing the issue. ISIS and al Nusra, designated terrorist organizations by the ISSG and UN, have been responsible for systematic and widespread human rights violations.¹³⁰

The UN notes that women and girls in ISIS-held areas face ‘unbearable restrictions’ on their rights to education, work and freedom of movement, and that Yazidi women in particular are targeted for ‘extreme sexual and physical violence’.¹³¹

In its February 2016 report, the Independent Commission of Inquiry on Syria (CIS) noted ongoing attacks and the use of explosive devices by ISIS in population centres like Hasakah, Ar Raqqa, Deir ez Zour, Homs and Aleppo. ISIS is reportedly responsible for attacks on supply lines between Hamah and Aleppo city, which serve millions of civilians. The ISSG members’ increasingly militarized approach to the crisis has ‘failed to eradicate its [ISIS] ability to attack sensitive areas’ in Syria, according to the CIS.¹³²

Nor has it prevented ISIS from carrying out operations abroad. Four times as many ISIS-claimed or inspired attacks occurred internationally in January 2016 compared with January 2015.¹³³ At the same time, some measures aimed at combating terrorism have blocked aid agencies’ provision of life-saving assistance to people in need. Counter-terrorism legislation and policies, including restrictions on financial transactions, have made it much more difficult to support reputable local aid organizations in their life-saving work on behalf of civilians.¹³⁴

↓ In August 2014, thousands of Yazidis who were rescued or escaped from an ISIS attack on the Sinjar Mountains in Iraq, crossed into Syria.

PAUL ENKELAAR/SV



4 CONCLUSION

In its resolutions and statements, the UNSC has provided a framework for easing humanitarian suffering and issued repeated demands for their implementation. The parties to the conflict hold the responsibility to implement this framework. However, as new rounds of negotiations are meant to begin, accompanied by calls for improved humanitarian access and the cessation of sieges, it is clear the very governments that agreed to the resolutions have been fuelling the fire of conflict.

The parties to the Syria conflict bear direct responsibility for the horrific consequences it has unleashed. The failure to end five years of violence, however, also rests with the governments that sit on the UNSC and the ISSG.

Given the increasingly international nature of Syria's war, the members of the Security Council and the ISSG with direct influence over the combatants on the battlefield must stand up for Syria's people and the stability and prosperity of the wider region. Security Council and ISSG members and their allies exert real political, diplomatic and military influence.

The ability to ensure an end to the violence and suffering, and facilitate a sustainable and just peace is now imperative for the protection of civilians in Syria, the region, and beyond.

RECOMMENDATIONS

PROTECTION OF CIVILIANS

PARTIES TO THE CONFLICT, INCLUDING UNSC MEMBERS MILITARILY ACTIVE IN SYRIA, SHOULD:

- ▶ Immediately halt all attacks against civilians and civilian-populated areas.
- ▶ Comply with the terms of the ISSG agreement on the cessation of hostilities and ensure this leads to a lasting agreement to end the violence;
- ▶ Abide by international humanitarian law and immediately cease attacks on schools, hospitals, and other critical civilian infrastructure;
- ▶ Immediately end grave abuses of human rights and investigate and take appropriate action where there are credible allegations of violations;
- ▶ Immediately end the use of explosive weapons with wide-area effects in populated areas, including but not limited to barrel bombs, mortars, and other weapons already banned, such as cluster munitions.

THE UNSC SHOULD:

- ▶ Take immediate steps to hold all parties to the conflict accountable for breaches of international law; in particular ensuring there is full accountability for war crimes and other serious human rights violations to counter impunity and help deter future violations;
- ▶ Impose measures to halt the transfer of arms and ammunition where there is a clear risk that parties will use them to commit serious or systematic violations of international humanitarian and human rights law, and consider imposing an arms embargo on the country;
- ▶ Press all countries, including those neighbouring Syria, to ensure that those fleeing the conflict can seek asylum in their territory and refrain from the *refoulement* of refugees.

OTHER GOVERNMENTS WITH INFLUENCE IN SYRIA (ESPECIALLY TURKEY, QATAR, SAUDI ARABIA, IRAN) SHOULD:

- ▶ Halt political and military actions that have the potential to further fuel the conflict, including by stemming the supply of arms, ammunition and military personnel to parties where there is a clear risk of violations;
- ▶ Agree on measures to de-escalate the conflict.

UN IMPLEMENTING AGENCIES AND THEIR PARTNERS SHOULD:

- ▶ Step up monitoring, reporting and advocacy efforts on issues of protection concern;
- ▶ Set up a UN monitoring mechanism to specifically enumerate civilian casualties, providing periodic reports to ISSG and UNSC, with recommendations for relevant parties – whether national or international – to ensure accountability;
- ▶ Significantly scale up protection programming inside Syria, including across borders from neighbouring countries and support local Syrian aid organizations to do likewise;
- ▶ Establish plans for the safe evacuation of civilians for those who wish to leave areas where their lives are at risk.

HUMANITARIAN ACCESS

PARTIES TO THE CONFLICT, INCLUDING UNSC MEMBERS MILITARILY ACTIVE IN SYRIA, SHOULD:

- ▶ Facilitate safe, unfettered, consistent and effective access by impartial aid agencies to all parts of Syria in order to respond to the priority humanitarian needs of civilians;
- ▶ Grant freedom of movement to civilians and facilitate their access to the goods and services they need.
- ▶ End all attacks on aid workers and humanitarian convoys, and investigate and take appropriate action where these attacks have taken place.

THE SYRIAN GOVERNMENT SHOULD:

- ▶ Remove administrative barriers which limit the work of aid agencies, including by:
 - ▶▶ Setting up a fast-tracked system for granting registration to international aid agencies, and visas, residency and work permits for humanitarian staff in Syria;
 - ▶▶ Allow more international NGOs to work directly with Syrian aid organizations working for the benefit of the civilian population, including those operating in areas under the control of armed opposition groups.

THE UNSC SHOULD:

- ▶ Urgently address the unintended negative impacts on humanitarian action by its resolutions that aim to combat terrorism. This includes reversing decisions that exclude certain civilian populations from assistance, including urgent medical care, and severely curtail humanitarian access or slow responsiveness to areas controlled by listed terrorist groups.

OTHER GOVERNMENTS WITH INFLUENCE IN SYRIA (ESPECIALLY TURKEY, QATAR, SAUDI ARABIA, IRAN) SHOULD:

- ▶ Strongly and consistently press the parties to the conflict to allow unimpeded cross-border and cross-line aid.

COUNTRIES NEIGHBOURING SYRIA SHOULD:

- ▶ Ensure a regulatory environment (registration and work permit regulations, cross-border mobility including for Syrian aid workers, etc.) for aid agencies that ensures accountability while permitting them unhindered access to affected Syrians.

BESIEGED AREAS

ALL PARTIES TO THE CONFLICT SHOULD:

- ▶ Immediately lift all sieges throughout Syria and allow immediate unfettered and consistent humanitarian access for aid agencies and freedom of movement for civilians;
- ▶ Allow humanitarian organizations access for the delivery of humanitarian service, including medical assistance, rather than only of food and non-food items (NFIs). Allow the evacuation of people in need of immediate medical care, and ensure that these people are guaranteed the ability to return to their homes.

OTHER GOVERNMENTS WITH INFLUENCE IN SYRIA (ESPECIALLY IRAN AND RUSSIA) SHOULD:

- ▶ Press the Syrian government to agree to multiple, regular and ongoing deliveries for aid convoys, rather than one-off approvals. Regular deliveries should be the norm, not the exception.

UN IMPLEMENTING AGENCIES AND MEMBERS OF THE ISSG HUMANITARIAN TASK FORCE SHOULD:

- ▶ Increase efforts pressing the Syrian government and armed groups to allow sustained access for the delivery of humanitarian aid, including education, health and other services;
- ▶ Consistent with the establishment of a new Monitoring and Verification Mechanism authorized in UNSCR 2258, request the establishment of offices and/or an ongoing presence in all locations which are currently considered besieged in order to coordinate and monitor the response and provide services. Consult with local Syrian aid organizations already delivering assistance in besieged areas, and where possible, provide support to scale up their efforts without further risks to their staff;
- ▶ Regularly review the criteria used by OCHA to determine if a location is besieged, prioritizing analysis of needs and where people are dying or at risk, even if there is limited humanitarian access and/or freedom of movement.

LOCAL CEASEFIRES AND CESSATION OF HOSTILITIES

ALL PARTIES INVOLVED IN A CEASEFIRE AGREEMENT SHOULD:

- ▶ End the use of siege and starvation tactics to pressure warring parties to surrender or agree to a ceasefire;
- ▶ Ensure civilians, the UN and civil society organizations are meaningfully involved in the negotiations of ceasefires. Unfettered humanitarian access, for example to assess needs and deliver appropriate services, should be part of agreements and should not be used as bargaining chips in the negotiations;
- ▶ Strictly adhere to agreed terms of negotiated truces, and ensure that affiliated militias and groups respect decisions of local ceasefire committees.

UNSC MEMBER STATES SHOULD:

- ▶ Establish a UN monitoring mechanism and swiftly deploy a UN monitoring team to ensure that agreements are adhered to and violations of human rights and IHL are prevented;
- ▶ Ensure all ceasefire monitoring missions are sufficiently resourced and the UN monitoring teams have full access to operate in ceasefire areas. Any violations should be reported to the UNSC and ISSG with mechanisms to address the situation;
- ▶ Link local ceasefire agreements to the larger comprehensive peace plan to ensure local-level ceasefires are not utilized for military tactics.

UNSC, ITS MEMBERS AND OTHER GOVERNMENTS WITH INFLUENCE IN SYRIA, INCLUDING TURKEY, QATAR, SAUDI ARABIA AND IRAN SHOULD:

- ▶ Use their influence to ensure that warring parties respect the rights of evacuated or demobilized civilians as a result of ceasefire in accordance with international humanitarian law;
- ▶ Ensure the UN monitoring teams work closely with civil society, women, youth and religious leaders on local ceasefires to ensure civil society ownership of the wider peace process and full involvement in the implementation of the peace plan.

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