



# Security Council

Sixty-eighth year

**7049**<sup>th</sup> meeting

Friday, 25 October 2013, 9.30 a.m.

New York

*Provisional*

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<i>President:</i>	Mr. Mehdiyev . . . . .	(Azerbaijan)
<i>Members:</i>	Argentina . . . . .	Mrs. Perceval
	Australia . . . . .	Mr. Quinlan
	China . . . . .	Mr. Zhao Yong
	France . . . . .	Mr. Araud
	Guatemala . . . . .	Mr. Rosenthal
	Luxembourg . . . . .	Ms. Lucas
	Morocco . . . . .	Mr. Laassel
	Pakistan . . . . .	Mr. Sahebzada Ahmed Khan
	Republic of Korea . . . . .	Mr. Sul Kyung-hoon
	Russian Federation . . . . .	Mr. Churkin
	Rwanda . . . . .	Mr. Gasana
	Togo . . . . .	Mr. Menan
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland . . . .	Sir Mark Lyall Grant
	United States of America . . . . .	Ms. Power

## Agenda

The situation in the Middle East

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*The meeting was called to order at 9.35 a.m.*

### **Adoption of the agenda**

*The agenda was adopted.*

### **The situation in the Middle East**

**The President:** In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of Turkey to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Ms. Valerie Amos, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I give the floor to Ms. Amos.

**Ms. Amos:** Mr. President, I thank you for the opportunity to update the Security Council on the humanitarian situation in Syria.

I would like to begin by thanking the Council for the adoption of its presidential statement on 2 October on the humanitarian situation in Syria (S/PRST/2013/15). The statement demonstrated a unity of purpose in the Council's response to the humanitarian crisis in Syria and was a clear recognition that the appalling suffering inflicted on ordinary women, children and men by the conflict is completely unacceptable.

I regret to report that, despite the Council's grave alarm at the significant and rapid deterioration of the humanitarian situation and its call for urgent increased humanitarian action, fighting continues to intensify across the country and its impact on civilians continues to grow each day.

Ongoing assessments reveal a substantial increase in needs and in internal displacement. As winter begins to fall across the country for a third year since the conflict began, millions live in makeshift shelters exposed to the elements and unprotected from the cold. All Palestinian refugee camps have been affected by the conflict; tens of thousands of Palestine refugees have had their homes damaged or destroyed, and more than 50 per cent have been displaced.

Diseases, including those easily preventable by basic hygiene and vaccination, are spreading at an

alarming rate. Just last week, we received reports of polio cases in Deir-ez-Zor, which, if confirmed, will mark the first polio outbreak in Syria in 14 years. In Aleppo and other cities, leishmaniasis is rife, disfiguring and scarring children's faces for the rest of their lives. There are also worrying reports of rapidly increasing malnutrition. People suffering from chronic illnesses, such as cancer and diabetes, lack access to treatment, and they also are dying — silently.

On 2 October, the Council called on all parties to the Syrian conflict to immediately cease and desist from all violations of international humanitarian law and violations and abuses of human rights and to take all appropriate steps to protect civilians. Yet three weeks later, we continue to receive reports of both Government and opposition military positions being established in populated areas and of the occupation and indiscriminate attacks against civilian infrastructure, including schools, hospitals, power plants and water points.

On Wednesday, a gas pipeline was hit, shutting down power in Damascus and many other locations across the country. Since the war began, over 3,000 schools and a significant number of mosques have been damaged or destroyed. Most flour mills and bakeries are no longer operational. Medical facilities have been particularly hard hit; around 60 per cent of hospitals, 38 per cent of health centres, 90 per cent of ambulances and 70 per cent of pharmaceutical plants have been affected by the crisis. The deliberate targeting of hospitals, medical personnel and transportation remains a daily reality.

Despite the intensification of the conflict, United Nations agencies and partners continue to work in extremely dangerous and difficult conditions across the country to reach millions of people with regular humanitarian assistance. The World Food Programme has scaled up its operations and now aims to reach 4 million people each month, half of whom are in opposition-held or contested areas. UNICEF and partners have provided around 10 million people with access to safe water countrywide since the beginning of the year, and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and partners have provided core relief items, such as blankets and mattresses, to almost 2.4 million people, around 40 per cent of them in opposition-held or disputed areas. This year, approximately 2.7 million people have had medical consultations, treatments and interventions, and 2 million have been reached with emergency health

kits by the World Health Organization and health partners. Ahead of the new school year, which began on 15 September, UNICEF distributed schoolbags and stationery to 1 million children in all 14 governorates as part of its Back to Learning campaign.

In addition to our regular aid deliveries, since January we have managed to provide one-off assistance to nearly 2.3 million people in hard-to-reach areas, including nearly 1.8 million in opposition-held or contested areas, through United Nations interagency convoys. In mid-October, we delivered food, medical supplies, essential items and water and sanitation assistance for the first time in many months to people in the opposition-held areas of Ter Mallah and Al-Gantho in Homs.

Yet despite our best efforts, the humanitarian response in Syria remains severely insufficient compared to growing needs. More than three months since my last briefing to the Council (see S/PV.7000), we are still unable to provide assistance to an estimated 2.5 million people trapped in hard-to-reach and besieged areas, despite our attempts to use the provisions of the presidential statement to do much more. Many of the 2.5 million have not been reached for almost a year. Opposition groups continue to besiege the towns of Nubul and Zahra in rural Aleppo, while Government forces continue to besiege the towns of eastern Ghouta, Al-Hajar Al-Aswad and Moadamiyah in rural Damascus and the old city in Homs. Other locations, such as Yarmouk, Dara'a/Al-Balad, Khan Sheikh and many others, remain difficult to access due to ongoing fighting. Although over 3,000 people were evacuated from Moadamiyah on 13 October, more remain trapped and in need of urgent assistance. Despite my call on 19 October for an immediate pause in hostilities to allow humanitarian agencies unhindered access to evacuate the remaining civilians and deliver life-saving assistance, we have still been unable to reach the area.

In its presidential statement of 2 October, the Council urged the Syrian authorities to take immediate steps to facilitate the expansion of humanitarian relief operations and lift bureaucratic impediments and other obstacles. We are engaging with the Government of Syria on these issues but have, regrettably, as yet not had any major breakthrough.

All humanitarian staff missions and convoys continue to require written approval. The processing of visas for United Nations and international

non-governmental organization (NGO) staff members is unpredictable. More than 100 visas — 62 for United Nations staff and 39 for international NGOs — remain pending. Many receive single entry visas, and staff are often issued visas for a duration shorter than their contract. Only 15 international NGOs are allowed to operate in Syria, and they face restrictions in establishing sub-national presences. While the number of national NGOs approved to work with the United Nations has increased to 66, the number approved to operate in areas with the greatest needs remains extremely limited. There is still no progress on the establishment of additional humanitarian hubs, including in Aleppo, Qamishly and Dara'a, requested more than one year ago. Lengthy customs procedures, complications relating to the sanctions regime, and border insecurity continue to delay the importation of essential communication equipment.

We are now facing additional hurdles. The Council, in its statement, called for the safe and unhindered passage of humanitarian convoys, yet the situation on the ground is increasingly complex and dangerous. Some estimate that there are as many as 2,000 armed opposition groups in Syria. Clashes among these groups are increasingly common, and key humanitarian access routes have been cut off by fierce fighting. While we have been able to negotiate access to some areas, command and control structures in others are unclear and difficult to navigate. At the same time, kidnappings and abductions of humanitarian workers are increasingly common, as are hijacking and the seizure of aid trucks. Last week, we had a convoy that was ready to go, but we could not get enough drivers as they feared for their lives.

I must reiterate that without real and sustained pressure from the Council on the Government of Syria and opposition groups on the ground, it will be impossible to make further progress. We also need additional funds. Many Member States generously pledged more support in the lead-up to the new session of the General Assembly, yet our appeal for the work in Syria and neighbouring countries is only 54 per cent funded. I know that we are not able to reach all those needing help, but we must continue to support those we can while continuing to seek greater access. A winterization plan prepared for Syria requires \$1.8 million to meet the most urgent needs. This funding must be received immediately, or it will be too late to procure and deliver urgently needed supplies.

I and my colleagues have said repeatedly that only a genuine political process can stop the horrendous suffering of the Syrian people and that the status quo must not continue. In the meantime, we need more humanitarian action immediately to reach the ordinary men, women and children who, through no fault of their own, are caught up in this conflict. No one is taking their obligations under international humanitarian law and human rights law seriously. The Council must make every effort to ensure that its recommendations are implemented. It must ensure that the parties to the conflict understand that they must take their responsibilities and obligations under international humanitarian law seriously.

We need humanitarian pauses immediately in all locations where communities are being held hostage by one party or the other to the conflict to deliver food, medicine and shelter. People must be allowed to move to safer areas without fear of attack. We need those who control the checkpoints on both sides of the conflict to ensure the safe and unhindered passage of humanitarian convoys. We need the Government to immediately lift all bureaucratic impediments to humanitarian operations. There is simply no reason

why humanitarian staff, whose only interest is to help those in desperate need, have not been granted visas to scale up our operations.

This is a race against time. Three weeks have passed since the adoption of the Council's statement, with little change to report. Each day that passes without the parties upholding their most basic obligations results in more lives lost, more people displaced and more people denied access to the most basic services. As we deliberate, people continue to die unnecessarily. I call upon all the members of the Council to exert influence and take the necessary action to stop this brutality and violence. The Council's leadership role is vital.

Words, despite their ability to shock, cannot really paint a picture of the grim and gruesome reality of Syria today. I am extremely disappointed that we have not been able to make further progress.

**The President:** I thank Ms. Amos for her briefing.

There are no more names inscribed on the list of speakers. I now invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion on the subject.

*The meeting rose at 9.50 a.m.*