

**UNITED
NATIONS****MEETINGS COVERAGE**SECURITY COUNCIL >
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17 APRIL 2018**Humanitarian Response in Syria Must Be Urgently Boosted, Emergency Relief Coordinator Tells Security Council**

Casting a spotlight on the pressing needs of civilians in Raqqa and Rukban, the Security Council met this afternoon to hear a briefing on recent developments and discuss ways forward.

While people in those cities comprised 1 per cent of those requiring help, their needs were no less important than the remaining 99 per cent, said Mark Lowcock, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator. In Raqqa, where 100,000 people had returned since October when Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Da'esh) had been forced out, conditions were not conducive for returns because of high levels of unexploded ordnance and improvised explosive device contamination. In addition, there were scant basic services, a lack of electricity and mobile communications and food insecurity.

Describing other concerns, he said in Rukban some 50,000 people were in need of sustained humanitarian assistance. Those remaining in the town of Douma and other areas of eastern Ghouta required urgent assistance after years of deprivation, he said, adding that the humanitarian community had not yet been able to provide help. On 25 March, the United Nations had requested permission from the Government of Syria to deploy an interagency surge team to scale up the United Nations operational capacity, he said, adding that he could not overstate the importance of sustaining and scaling up the international response.

Council members underscored the need for sustained aid deliveries, with some calling on all Member States to make substantial commitments at the upcoming Brussels pledging conference and to swiftly disburse pledges. Some delegates said mine clearing should be a priority to ensure safe returns of displaced persons, while many members urged parties to return to negotiations to find a political solution to end the conflict.

Echoing a common call, China's representative appealed to all parties in Syria to comply with Security Council resolution 2401 (2018) by ceasing hostilities and coordinating with United Nations humanitarian efforts. Any unilateral action would violate the basic norms of international law while complicating a settlement of the Syrian issue, he said, urging all sides to refrain from moves that would further escalate the situation.

The representative of the Russian Federation, noting that Raqqa's destruction had been due to a United States-led coalition fight against ISIL, criticized coalition members for their lack of reconstruction in that area. Civilians were regularly killed by landmines and no assessment of humanitarian needs had occurred until the Russian Federation had insisted on it. In addition, no practical steps had been taken to provide humanitarian assistance to the population of Rukban, which was located near an American airbase. Urging the Council and the humanitarian community to address the situation of those two cities, he said coalition members should outline how they themselves were implementing resolution 2401 (2018).

Meanwhile, the United States delegate said that while the 75 members of the Global Coalition against Da'esh had targeted ISIL and liberated civilians, the Syrian Government had bombarded its own people. United Nations humanitarian convoys were welcome at any time in Raqqa and Rukban, with any delays being the result of the Syrian Government and its failure to allow deliveries. Condemning the Russian Federation for its "cynical, thinly disguised diversions", she said it was clear that it had requested the Council meeting as a distraction from the atrocities committed by the Bashar Al-Assad regime.

Providing another perspective, Syria's representative said three Council members continued to search for microscopic dust while ignoring the enormous "elephant in the room", which was the aggression they had launched against his country. Raqqa was a martyr city that had been destroyed by those very States, he said, adding that the coalition had never sought to combat terrorism. Indeed, the point had been to block the Syrian Government and its allies as they attempted to combat ISIL. Turning to the situation in the Rukban camps, he said coalition forces had prevented the Government from delivering aid. Moreover, he asserted that the situation in Syria did not require draft resolutions or semi-daily meetings. Instead, the Council must stand against the occupation of Syria by the United States, Israel and Turkey and aggressions carried out by the United States, France and the United Kingdom.

Drawing attention to the effects of the crisis on the Syrian people, Equatorial Guinea's representative said the situation in Raqqa required the international community's urgent attention. Calling for sustained humanitarian access and the intensification of efforts to reach a political solution, he reminded Council members that "the Syrian people have suffered enough."

Also speaking were the representatives of Kuwait, Sweden, France, United Kingdom, Kazakhstan, Poland, Côte d'Ivoire, Netherlands, Bolivia, Ethiopia and Peru.

The meeting began at 4:48 p.m. and ended at 6:38 p.m.

Briefing

MARK LOWCOCK, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, briefed the Council on the situation in Syria, including in Raqqa and Rukban. While people in those cities totalled 1 per cent of those requiring help, their needs were no less important than the remaining 99 per cent. After a United Nations assessment mission on 1 April in Raqqa, where 100,000 people had returned since October when Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Da'esh) had been forced out, reports showed that conditions were not conducive for returns because of high levels of unexploded ordnance and improvised explosive device contamination. Every week, 50 casualties had been reported due to the remnants of war. Also, an estimated 70 to 80 per cent of all buildings had been destroyed or damaged. While public services were slowly resuming, the city lacked electricity and mobile communications while water was being pumped at a very limited capacity to the outskirts. Meanwhile, up to 95 per cent of households that had returned to Raqqa were food insecure and health services were lacking. Some schools had reopened, but lacked supplies. United Nations agencies were planning deliveries of humanitarian assistance and programmatic interventions to support the work of humanitarian agencies already active in those areas.

In Rukban, some 50,000 people were in need of sustained humanitarian assistance, he continued, noting that there was a pressing need for better service provision and medical help. Humanitarian agencies were working closely with the United States, Russian Federation and the Syrian Arab Red Crescent to facilitate deliveries. At the same time, those remaining in the town of Douma and other areas of eastern Ghouta, under control of the Government of Syria, required urgent assistance after years of deprivation. The humanitarian community had not yet been able to provide that, he said, adding that access to reach the people of eastern Ghouta was critical.

Of the 155,000 who had been displaced, he said, approximately 63,000 had moved north to Idlib and Aleppo, resulting in a 25 per cent increase in Idlib's displaced population. That situation placed incredible pressure on host communities and humanitarian actors working to provide assistance and services. Those remaining in Afrin were also in dire need of aid. Despite some positive developments, humanitarian partners were still struggling to gain sustained access to Afrin and freedom of movement for internally displaced persons remained severely limited. On 25 March, the United Nations requested permission from the Government of Syria to deploy an interagency surge team to scale up the United Nations operational capacity. Overall, he could not overstate the importance of sustaining and scaling up the international response.

Statements

VASSILY A. NEBENZIA (Russian Federation), noting that some delegations were constantly calling on his country to provide updates on its implementation of resolution 2401 (2018), said significant efforts had been undertaken to improve the situation in eastern Ghouta, where armed groups had long held populations hostage. "A bloodbath was prevented," he said, adding that some 60,000 people had also been helped to return to their homes. Joint work was ongoing between the Russian military police and Syrian law enforcement officials, including debris clearance, re-establishment of services and food deliveries. However, the international community's attention was also required, he said, calling for additional support from other Member States.

In contrast, he said, Raqqa — which had been destroyed by United States-led coalition air strikes — had seen no reconstruction efforts. Civilians were regularly killed by landmines, and no assessment of humanitarian needs had taken place until the Russian Federation had insisted on it. Buildings were in ruins, thousands of corpses remained buried and no school, hospital or basic services remained operational. No practical steps had been taken to provide humanitarian assistance to the population of the similarly damaged city of Rukban, located near an American airbase whose very existence constituted a blatant violation of Syria's sovereignty. Urging the Council and the humanitarian community not to ignore the situation of those two cities, he said members of the coalition should be courageous enough to outline how they themselves were implementing resolution 2401 (2018) in those cases.

Events over recent days had revealed the hypocrisy of the "troika" — namely, the United States, United Kingdom and France, he said. By their acts of aggression, those countries and their supporters had taken sides in the Syrian conflict. The Russian Federation was instead working with all sides, committing to implementing Council resolutions and supporting the parties in making progress in the Geneva talks, which must resume without preconditions and especially without demands for a regime change. Given current developments, it was hard to imagine that the Government of Syria would want to talk about the situation in its country with any members of the troika, who sought to declare its President a war criminal. Indeed, before any progress could be made, "you first need to undo the damage that you yourself have created", he said, noting that the opposition must step back from its destructive position while embracing Council resolutions, and their patrons must end their militant rhetoric against the legitimately elected President of Syria.

Meanwhile, he said, the establishment of a mechanism to attribute responsibility for the use of chemical weapons in Syria made no sense, as Washington, D.C., and its allies were already acting like self-appointed executioners on that matter. Attempts to push the Russian Federation to change its position using air strikes and the threat of sanctions had never

worked in the past nor would they work in the future. The United States and its allies must end its threats to use force against Syria, as such actions flouted international law and only drove peace farther away. Warning against attempts to maintain foreign occupation in parts of Syria, loot its resources and stoke divisions between its people, he said military groups must also separate themselves from terrorists and Western parties should stop manipulating the humanitarian situation for political purposes.

BADER ABDULLAH N. M. ALMUNAYEKH ([Kuwait](#)) said resolution 2401 (2018) had addressed the humanitarian situation across Syria, demanding a pause in hostilities for 30 days to ensure the delivery of humanitarian assistance and allow for the evacuation of the sick and wounded. Voicing frustration that it had not yet been implemented, he reiterated the call on parties to the conflict to allow the entry of weekly convoys and for an immediate end to all attacks against civilians, civilian infrastructure and medical facilities. Urging the Astana guarantors, in particular, to continue to support talks. Welcoming the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs preparations of plans for providing humanitarian assistance in Raqqa, he underscored the need to maintain sustained aid delivery to internally displaced persons camps in Rukban.

OLOF ORRENIUS SKOOG ([Sweden](#)) said a greater effort must be made to ensure full and immediate implementation of resolution 2401 (2018) throughout Syria, with the Astana guarantors living up to their commitments. He called on the Syrian authorities to immediately grant facilitation letters for humanitarian convoys to Douma and to facilitate sustained United Nations access to camps housing internally displaced persons. Referring also the situations in Raqqa, Rukban, Idlib and Afrin, he said the humanitarian community was undertaking a Herculean task. However, the acute lack of funding for United Nations humanitarian operations in in Syria was deeply troubling, he said, calling on all Member States to make substantial commitments at the upcoming Brussels conference and to swiftly disburse pledges.

KELLEY A. ECKELS-CURRIE ([United States](#)) said the 75 members of the Global Coalition against Da'esh that had fought the terrorist group in Iraq had continued its eradication campaign in Syria. While the coalition had targeted ISIL and liberated civilians, the Syrian Government had bombarded its own people. Noting that United Nations humanitarian convoys were welcome at any time in Raqqa and Rukban, the United States stood ready to support deliveries. Any delays stemmed from the Bashar al-Assad regime and its failure to allow convoys to move. The United States had already provided assistance, clearing 3,000 remnants of war and contributing 300,000 pounds of food. Pointing out that the Russian Federation had called the Council meeting as part of a messaging campaign to distract the international community from the atrocities committed by the Assad regime, she reiterated that in addition to a ceasefire, the Council had called for unhindered access for humanitarian assistance. Yet, the regime had only allowed six convoys. Such calls by the Council needed to be implemented on the ground, but that required the Syrian Government's cooperation, she said, condemning the Russian Federation for its "cynical, thinly disguised diversions".

FRANÇOIS DELATTRE ([France](#)) said the humanitarian situation in Syria screamed for attention, including those fleeing safe areas, the bureaucracy preventing access to camps and conditions in Raqqa, where 90,000 people had returned. Humanitarian actors needed access to provide much-needed basic services and efforts must continue to remove landmines. For its part, France was helping with landmine clearance and had contributed €10 million for projects easing civilian returns to Raqqa. Concerning Rukban, he reiterated an urgent appeal to guarantee unimpeded humanitarian access. In that context, he supported the draft resolution that his country, United Kingdom and the United States had tabled on 14 April with a view to making progress on the humanitarian front, put a definite end to the Syrian chemical programme and begin conclusive political negotiations. That draft had sought areas of convergence to create conditions of real diplomatic progress in Syria and open the way for true negotiations.

KAREN PIERCE ([United Kingdom](#)), regretting to note that some members had used the humanitarian situation to score political points, recalled that the United Kingdom had contributed a total of \$3.5 billion to date for humanitarian assistance. Her Government continued to provide humanitarian support to Raqqa and surrounding areas and had aided with landmine clearance. Raising several concerns, she drew attention to the plight of displaced persons in Rukban and urged the regime to facilitate access to the United Nations and its partners to deliver aid to Douma and eastern Ghouta. She called on the Council to use recent events to get the political process back on track and was looking forward to the upcoming retreat in Sweden, which the Secretary-General would also attend.

KANAT TUMYSH ([Kazakhstan](#)), welcoming the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs assessment mission to Raqqa in April, raised concerns that an estimated 100,000 people had returned to their homes in that city despite the wide presence of unexploded ordnances. Highlighting the significant destruction of Raqqa and the precarious fate of the Rukban and Hadalat refugee camps, he warned the Council of a dangerous tendency for those camps to become havens for foreign mercenaries. Kazakhstan supported the Russian Federation's proposal to establish humanitarian corridors for withdrawing refugees from El Tanf and the Rukban camp, based on the example provided by Russian and Syrian military troops during the assault on Aleppo. Calling on all parties immediately suspend hostilities, implement resolution 2401 (2018) and report periodically on those efforts, he said the questions of boundaries and territories following Syria's prolonged war should be addressed in line with that country's Constitution in order to prevent the re-emergence of extremist groups.

PAWEL RADOMSKI ([Poland](#)), raising concerns about new internally displaced persons reaching Idlib, said the military conflict in north-west Syria had further complicated the situation on the ground. He called on all parties, especially the Russian Federation and Iran, to take action towards a cessation of hostility and to comply with all their obligations under

international law. He also urged the Russian Federation, Iran and Turkey to fulfil their responsibility as guarantors of the Astana process. There could be no military solution to the conflict, in Syria, he said, underlining that a political agreement remained the only sustainable solution.

ANATOLIO NDONG MBA ([Equatorial Guinea](#)) said Council members had recognized the very high number of people fleeing Syria when they had adopted resolution 2393 (2017). In the former ISIL stronghold of Raqqa, military offensives had led to significant destruction. Commending World Health Organization (WHO) efforts, he said Raqqa's residents continued to be deprived of aid because there were no nearby offices of humanitarian agencies and local authorities were incapable of providing assistance. The situation required the international community and the Council's urgent attention, he said, calling for the provision of sustained access allowing humanitarian convoys to reach Raqqa. "The Syrian people have suffered enough," he said, calling for the intensification of efforts to reach a political solution centred on the needs of the Syrian people and in full respect for Syria's territorial integrity.

THÉODORE DAH ([Côte d'Ivoire](#)), echoing expressions of regret that resolution 2401 (2018) remained unimplemented, called on all parties to ensure its full implementation across Syria including in Raqqa and Rukban. In the former, significant destruction, a dearth of basic services and the presence of unexploded ordnance posed serious obstacles for safe returns of civilians. Calling on the international community to address those situations, he said a needs assessment was urgently required to better understand the extremely precarious living conditions in Rukban's internally displaced persons camps. Such work must be part of a global effort to reach a negotiated political solution based on inclusive dialogue and in line with resolution 2254 (2015).

LISE GREGOIRE VAN HAAREN ([Netherlands](#)) emphasized the urgent need for access to Douma for humanitarian convoys and for the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) fact-finding mission. Calling for a humanitarian surge to address the urgent needs of internally displaced persons, she emphasized the situation of more than 180,000 people displaced by hostilities in Afrin, adding to the strain felt by host communities. Clearing improvised explosive devices was a priority in Raqqa, while in Rukban, both food and medical aid must reach the remaining displaced persons via the fastest and easiest route. Resolution 2401 (2018) must be implemented across Syria and efforts must succeed in ensuring humanitarian access and the protection of civilians, in line with international humanitarian law.

MA ZHAOXU ([China](#)) appealed to all parties in Syria to comply with resolution 2401 (2018), cease hostilities and coordinate with United Nations humanitarian efforts. Equal attention must be paid to the humanitarian situation and to helping displaced persons to return to their homes. Emphasizing China's adherence to the peaceful settlement of disputes and its rejection of the use of force in international regulations, he said any action taken must comply with the United Nations Charter. Any unilateral action would violate the basic norms of international law while complicating a settlement of the Syrian issue, he said, urging all sides to refrain from moves that would further escalate the situation.

PEDRO LUIS INCHAUSTE JORDÁN ([Bolivia](#)) underscored the pressing need to pursue mine clearing and to remove improvised explosive devices and remnants of war. Such work was vital for reconstruction and the return of basic services. Expressing regret that violence had continued unfettered in major cities, he said it was even more repugnant that schools, hospitals and residential areas were being targeted. Bolivia called on all stakeholders to spare no effort to implement resolution 2401 (2018) and for all parties to allow for unconditional humanitarian access. He went on to reiterate that the Syrian people should decide their political future through an inclusive process, free from external meddling.

DAWIT YIRGA WOLDEGERIMA ([Ethiopia](#)) said the destruction of infrastructure and limited public services remained major challenges in Syrian cities. Demining efforts should be strengthened and aid must be delivered to all parts of Syria via safe and unhindered humanitarian access. Underscoring the importance of fully implementing resolution 2401 (2018), he said the Council should restore its unity through genuine and productive dialogue.

GUSTAVO MEZA-CUADRA ([Peru](#)), Council President for April, speaking in his national capacity, welcomed efforts to clear "deadly booby-traps" laid by Da'esh in Raqqa and other areas. Recommendations from the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs mission to Raqqa would contribute to the safe return of displaced persons. While acknowledging the legitimate right of States to protect their borders, he said there should be unfettered access to Rukban, given the humanitarian situation there. It was vital that needs in Syria be met on a consistent basis, regardless of location, he said, adding that politicizing humanitarian assistance was unacceptable and a contravention of resolution 2401 (2018), which must be applied holistically throughout Syria.

BASHAR JA'AFARI ([Syria](#)) said three Council members continued to search for microscopic dust while ignoring the enormous "elephant in the room", which was the aggression they had launched against Syria. His counterpart from the United States had declared that her country's forces had rid Raqqa of 3,000 landmines. Yet, the United States had also assisted 4,000 terrorists to safely leave the city without holding them accountable for planting them. While Sweden's representative had called out the Syrian Government many times, he had failed to call for an end to the United States, Turkish and Israeli occupation of Syria and to mention State-sponsored terrorism. Addressing France's delegate, he said Médecins Sans Frontières, like ISIL, had entered Syria without the Syrian Government's approval, behaving instead like "terrorists without borders".

Providing an update on the OPCW fact-finding mission in Douma, he said the Syrian Government had facilitated the arrival today of a United Nations security team, which had entered the city around 3 p.m. local time. If the team found the situation to be secure, the OPCW fact-finding team would begin its work 18 April. Claims that the mission had been blocked had only intended to distract the international community from reality, he said, expressing regret that countries launched cowardly attacks against Syria still failed to understand the Syrian people's desire to determine their own destiny. "The days of hegemony are gone," he said, adding that no threat of force or support for terrorists would change the fact that the world's people were tired of seeing big Powers continue to disregard international law with impunity.

He said Raqqa was a martyr city that had been destroyed by those very States, with the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs declaring the destruction to be "100 per cent complete". Hundreds of thousands of people had fled Raqqa and no basic services or operating hospitals remained, except for Médecins Sans Frontières facilities. The coalition had never sought to combat terrorism, he said, recalling its bloody massacres of civilians in various towns and villages across Syria. Indeed, the point had been to block the Syrian Government and its allies as they attempted to combat ISIL. On 8 February, United States forces had killed dozens of members of a popular force that had been fighting ISIL along the Euphrates River. Meanwhile, terrorists had been spared and even armed so they could wreak further havoc.

Turning to the situation in the Rukban camps, he said coalition forces had prevented the Government from delivering aid. The United States was using the area as a place to train terrorist forces, who would then be used to fight other battles in the region. The situation in Syria did not require draft resolutions or semi-daily meetings. Instead, what was needed was for the Council to stand against the occupation of Syria by the United States, Israel and Turkey, aggressions carried out by the United States, France and the United Kingdom and the imposition of coercive measures against the Syrian people.

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