

United Nations



Nations Unies

Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

**REMARKS BY UNDER-SECRETARY-GENERAL FOR HUMANITARIAN AFFAIRS
AND EMERGENCY RELIEF COORDINATOR, MARK LOWCOCK**

At the fifth Brussels Conference on “Supporting the future of Syria and the region”

New York, 30 March 2021 (Virtual Event)

As delivered

OPENING REMARKS (Followed by Closing Remarks Below)

Excellencies, representatives of governments, UN and NGO colleagues, ladies and gentlemen.

Thank you all for joining us for this fifth Brussels conference.

Today is about addressing the dire humanitarian needs of the Syrian people and about supporting countries hosting Syrian refugees.

Your presence today, and your commitment over the years, matters.

To begin, we have a message from UN Secretary-General António Guterres.

[SG pre-recorded message].

Secretary-General Guterres has captured the scale, severity and complexity of the situation in Syria.

I just want to say few more words about the impact of this crisis on children, which is really unfathomable.

Something like half of Syria’s children have known nothing but a lifetime of conflict. Tens of thousands of them have died.

Almost half of all young people in Syria have lost an immediate family member or a close friend.

And those deep-rooted traumas remain completely unaddressed.

Close to 2.5 million Syrian children — including 40 per cent of girls— are not going to school.

One in three schools cannot be used because they have been destroyed or damaged. Or because they now house displaced families or are being used for military purposes.

And the pandemic has made it even harder for children in Syria to go to school.

Students with disabilities and girls are among the most affected.

That is why I urge donors here today, as part of your pledges, really to prioritize support for children's education in Syria and in the region.

We count on your continued support.

Thank you.

CLOSING REMARKS

First, Valerie [Ms. Valerie Hopkins, moderator], thank you very much for your skilful and professional moderation of our exhaustive proceedings today.

Let me also extend again my thanks, Janez [Mr. Janez Lenarčič, EU Commissioner for Crisis Management], to you and to all your colleagues, including the High Representative, for your admirable professionalism also in co-hosting with the United Nations today's proceedings.

Over the last couple of hours, we have heard, I think, from the heads of all of the major UN humanitarian agencies, as well as the agencies of the Red Cross Movement, and several NGO agencies – all of those organizations providing help to Syrians inside their country and in the region. And everybody said the same thing: “Things are getting worse.”

We have had a decade of death, destruction, displacement, disease, dread and despair.

That's why we have the biggest ever Response Plan for all of Syria and the region this year – nearly US\$10 billion trying to reach 10 million people inside Syria, and another 10 million people and nearly 5 million refugees and members of host communities in Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey.

Despite all the challenges you have all heard about, humanitarian agencies have been able to save hundreds of thousands of lives, by getting help and protection to those people.

In fact, last year, we increased by nearly 30 per cent the number of people we were assisting – up to 7.7 million people – each month inside Syria.

But as David Beasley said a few minutes ago, we did that at the expense of providing less help to each person. And that is one of the reasons why poverty itself is increasing.

If we are going to continue to help Syrians, we basically need two things. We need access and funding. And on access, I want to reiterate what many speakers have said today – that the cross-border operation is essential if we are going to reach all of those in need.

In the long term, again, as everybody said, what Syria needs is a ceasefire and a political settlement.

But until then, Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, the humanitarian assistance we provide across Syria and in the region saves lives, protects people, provides education, and prevents the humanitarian situation from getting worse.

It also depends on your generous and continuing funding.

Thank you.