

AS DELIVERED

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**Anthony Lake, UNICEF Executive Director
UNHCR High Level Event
“Solidarity & Burden-Sharing with Countries Hosting
Syrian Refugees”
Geneva, Switzerland
September 30, 2013**

Madame Chairperson, Excellencies, Partners, and my friend Antonio;

The Syrian crisis is, in far too many ways, a children’s crisis. Last month, we passed a very grim milestone — the one millionth Syrian refugee child fleeing across Syria's borders. Each one an individual life, an individual future.

I ask each of you, as a human being, to imagine their struggles. Having witnessed unspeakable violence, they were torn from their lives to make the journey to refuge in another country, leaving home and hope behind. Once there, they face a new set of challenges — crowded, makeshift schools, if they are in school at all...all too often denied health care, water and sanitation...wondering when-- or indeed if — their lives will ever be the same again.

But as UNICEF works with our partners, including UNHCR, to provide millions with drinking water...to immunize children...to give them access to education and counselling and safe places to play...we must also remember the lives of those children from Syria aren’t the only ones changed by the conflict.

Host countries are meeting refugees’ struggles with open hearts, not with closed doors. We should not be surprised by this spirit of generosity. The wells of Arab hospitality — of neighbours helping neighbours, of newcomers welcomed — run very deep. And we hope they will continue to do so.

But UNHCR knows better than anyone that, as these children and their families escape, they place a heavy burden on communities in these countries. Countries already hard pressed to provide for their own children. Countries already deeply challenged by disparities and inequities.

Yes, the more than two million Syrian refugees who have fled to camps and communities in Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, Turkey and Egypt face enormous challenges.

But we cannot fully honour the actions of Syria’s neighbours to open their doors — and their public services — to new people in need, without also recognizing the enormous strain this causes to systems already stretched to their limit.

Jordan’s sewage and water systems are under critical strain as a result of increased demand from host communities and refugee camps.

In Lebanon, health facilities are stretched beyond capacity as are their schools. Public health officials have reported an increase in hepatitis A and measles, a dangerous killer of children. This will likely worsen as winter approaches.

The demands in Iraq grow; Turkey is burdened. And these strains create longer-term dangers.

As refugees flee to areas already riven by inequalities, we can only expect disparities between rich and poor, haves and have-nots, to deepen and multiply in Syria's neighbors. Growing resentment can then threaten national and regional stability.

So our response to these dangers must marry immediate needs to future needs — the immediate needs of refugees fleeing the conflict...and also the longer-term needs of the countries hosting them. As Helen Clark said, humanitarian and development must act together.

For example, at the Zaatari camp in Jordan, UNICEF, UNHCR and partners are providing safe water, sanitation and hygiene services and facilities to more than 120,000 people. But we're also working with Jordan's government to provide local municipalities with new WASH services — including many trucks.

We've also helped immunize 1.3 million people in Jordan, Lebanon and Iraq against measles, both inside and outside the camps. Every child we immunize, every disease we prevent through proper water and sanitation facilities, will benefit those societies as a whole in the years to come.

And there is no better investment in a society's future than education. In Lebanon, UNICEF is working with the government to reach 200,000 refugee children by the end of the year, in part by implementing double shifts for teachers. And we're working with partners like the World Bank to support Lebanon's Ministry of Education as they educate not only Syrian newcomers, but their own children as well.

The world cannot afford a lost generation of Syrian children — unhealthy, uneducated, undernourished, unprepared to take on the task of rebuilding their shattered country. And growing up viewing the world through a lens of mistrust, conflict and violence — more likely someday to perpetrate on others the suffering they're enduring today.

Their rights — the rights of every child affected by the conflict — demand that all parties to the conflict respect international refugee law and safeguard access to protection for those fleeing the conflict.

And their rights demand additional financial support not only for the direct victims of the conflict — Syrian refugees — but for the regional victims of it as well.

We best honour the hospitality of neighboring countries — in their open doors and their open hearts — not by leaving them to manage the burden on their own, but by sharing it, in every way we can. All of us.
