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Report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014) and 2191 (2014)

I. Introduction

1. The present report is the twenty-first submitted pursuant to paragraph 17 of Security Council resolution 2139 (2014), paragraph 10 of Council resolution 2165 (2014) and paragraph 5 of Council resolution 2191 (2014), in which the Council requested me to report, every 30 days, on the implementation of the resolutions by all parties to the conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic. At the request of the Presidency of the Security Council, this report is submitted less than 30 days from the date of the previous report.

2. The information contained herein is based on the data available to the United Nations agencies on the ground from the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic and from open sources. Data from United Nations agencies and partners on their humanitarian deliveries have been reported for the period from 1 to 31 October 2015, where available.

II. Major developments

A. Political/military

3. Widespread conflict and high levels of violence continued throughout the Syrian Arab Republic in October. Indiscriminate and disproportionate aerial bombings and ground attacks on places with a large civilian presence by Government forces, non-State armed opposition groups and designated terrorist groups¹ continued to kill, injure, and displace civilians. The conduct of hostilities by all parties continued to be characterized by a widespread disregard for international humanitarian law and the obligation of all parties to protect civilians. While the United Nations has no independent means of verification, many sources report a continuation of the use of barrel bombs. The Syrian Network for Human Rights reported the use of 1,438 barrel bombs across the country in the month of October.

¹ On 30 May 2013, Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and the Nusrah Front were designated as terrorist groups by the Security Council in accordance with resolution 1267 (1999). The two groups operate in the Syrian Arab Republic.



On 9 November, a statement issued by the Syrian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates gave assurances that the Syrian Arab Armed Forces do not and will not use indiscriminate weapons.

4. Heavy fighting continued to be reported in Damascus and Rif Dimashq governorates. Government forces carried out airstrikes in various areas of eastern Ghutah in Rif Dimashq. The town of Duma was hit repeatedly during the month, including on 29 October, when airstrikes hit the main field hospital in Duma, killing at least 15 civilians and injuring 50 others, many of whom were medical personnel. On 30 October, several airstrikes hit the al-Hal market in Duma, killing at least 60 civilians and injuring 200 more. Elsewhere, according to reports received by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), over 30 civilians were killed and dozens injured in other attacks in eastern Ghutah during October, including in Ain Tarma, Hammura, Misraba and Harasta. Meanwhile, shelling in Marj temporarily displaced an estimated 1,400 families across eastern Ghutah and caused widespread destruction to critical infrastructure. In Darayya, OHCHR received reports that three people were killed between 25 and 29 October as a result of barrel bombs.

5. Non-State armed opposition groups continued to launch mortars and to shell Damascus city during the reporting period. OHCHR reported that on 1 October, a five year old child was killed when mortar rounds struck the rooftop of a residential building in Ish al-Werwer. On 13 October, the Embassy of the Russian Federation in the Mazra'a neighbourhood was hit, although no injuries were reported. On 14 October, a civilian was injured when a rocket struck an open area in the Mezzeh neighbourhood. On 17 October, one civilian was killed and seven injured when an improvised explosive device attached to a bicycle was detonated near a football pitch in Mezzeh. On 27 October, seven civilians were injured when mortar rounds hit Bab Tuma in old Damascus. Between 30 and 31 October, mortars struck several areas in Damascus, killing one civilian and injuring 12 others.

6. Fighting in Zabadani and Madaya, and in other areas in northwestern Rif Dimashq, as well as Fu'ah and Kafraya in Idlib governorate, decreased over the course of the reporting period following the ceasefire agreement reached in Istanbul, on 22 September 2015, with the facilitation of the Office of the United Nations Special Envoy for Syria. On 18 October, under the auspices of the agreement, a joint humanitarian convoy made up of United Nations personnel and other partners delivered assistance to Zabadani, Madaya and Buqayn, as well as to Fu'ah and Kafraya via a United Nations cross border operation through Turkey's Bab al-Hawa border crossing. The United Nations and its partners stand ready to immediately implement the remaining humanitarian elements of the agreement, including the delivery of additional humanitarian assistance and the evacuation of the wounded.

7. Intensified fighting between the parties continued in the northern governorates of the Syrian Arab Republic during the reporting period following ground and air offensives by the Government, supported by Russian-led airstrikes. In Hama and Idlib governorates, in October alone, an estimated 80,000 people were displaced by the fighting. Civilians were also killed and injured as a result of the fighting: for example, on 4 October, one civilian was killed and four wounded when Government forces dropped barrel bombs on a residential neighbourhood in Khan Shaykhun. OHCHR received reports that, on 26 October, a Government airstrike reportedly hit Kafr Nabel in Idlib, killing two civilians and injuring 10 others. On 20 October, a

health clinic in Sarmin that is supported by a non-governmental organization was hit by an airstrike, killing two people and injuring at least 28 civilians. On 25 October, a field hospital in Latamnah, Hama, was reportedly hit by an air strike, killing six people.

8. In Aleppo governorate, fighting escalated between the parties to the south of Aleppo city, following an offensive by Government forces in early October. In response, non-State armed opposition groups staged a number of counter offensives in late October. Some 50,000 people were displaced as a result of the fighting. Civilians were also killed and injured as a result of the escalation in fighting around Aleppo by all parties to the conflict: for example, on 2 October, Government helicopters dropped a number of barrel bombs on Al-Bab, resulting in tens of casualties according to information received by OHCHR. On 7 October, at least four civilians were killed when Government jets struck a residential area in Daret Azza. On 16 October, Government airstrikes on the town of Kafr Karmin killed at least nine civilians, including five children.

9. Fighting also continued in Aleppo city during the reporting period, as Government forces and non-State armed opposition groups continued to shell the city, causing casualties among civilians. On 14 October, non-State armed opposition groups fired canister bombs on the neighbourhoods of Aziza and Maidan. OHCHR received reports that, on 16 October, non-State armed opposition groups fired improvised explosive devices at a Government-controlled residential neighbourhood of Aleppo, killing a woman and her child. On 20 October, mortars landed in two schools in Government-controlled areas of western Aleppo city, killing an estimated 19 civilians. Meanwhile, on 30 October, airstrikes took place on Al-Kalasa, Al-Fardous, Salaheddine, Al-Sheikh Maqsoud, Al-Bab and other areas controlled by non-State armed opposition groups inside and outside the city, reportedly killing more than 65 and injuring more than 100 people.

10. ISIL continued to launch attacks in various governorates during the reporting period. On 23 October, ISIL exerted its control over a stretch of the Homs-Damascus highway around Khanaser, cutting the main land access route for humanitarian and commercial actors to Aleppo city from within the Syrian Arab Republic. This resulted in an increase in commodity prices for the 700,000 people living in Government-controlled areas of western Aleppo city. The Government re-secured the highway at the start of November. Meanwhile, in northern Aleppo governorate, ISIL advanced south of Mare'a in early October, seizing a number of villages in the Handarat area of the Aleppo countryside, close to Aleppo city, and the major route between eastern Aleppo city and the Bab al-Salam border crossing with Turkey. As part of the offensive on 6 October, ISIL detonated a vehicle-borne improvised explosive device in Hritan, killing more than 20 people.

11. In Dayr al-Zawr governorate, ISIL continued its attacks on the Dayr al-Zawr city military airbase, although Government and Russian airstrikes reportedly blocked ISIL advances towards the military airbase over the last two weeks of October and also targeted other ISIL positions in Dayr al-Zawr and Raqqah. For example, on 18 October, two people were reported killed when Government airstrikes hit Mayadin town. On 19 October, at least three civilians, including one woman, were killed when Government jets hit the Aridi neighbourhood of Dayr al-Zawr city.

12. On 15 October, in Homs governorate, fighting continued in the northern countryside. OHCHR received reports that, on 15 October, Government forces reportedly dropped barrel bombs on Talbiseh, killing 15 civilians. Three additional aerial attacks on Talbiseh were reportedly carried out on 23 October, killing 14 civilians, including six children. Meanwhile, six civilians were killed and 17 injured when Government forces struck Ghanto village on 26 October. On 27 October, Government forces hit the village of Halmoze, killing two civilians and wounding at least eight others. Separately, ISIL launched a sustained attack on central Homs in late October, which led to the capture of Mahin town by ISIL and the displacement of approximately 25,000 people.

13. In the Wa'r district of Homs city, multiple shellings and attacks from pro-Government forces were reported in October. For example, on 24 October, Government forces fired a mortar into the Wa'r district, damaging several houses. Since 31 August, pro-Government forces have closed all roads leading to Wa'r, and humanitarian supplies have not entered. However, on 31 October, local traders were allowed to bring in small quantities of food, and the Syrian Arab Red Crescent and Syrian non-governmental organizations delivered two small trucks full of medicines. Negotiations between the parties on a local agreement reportedly continue. On 3 November, the Office of the Special Envoy and the Office of the Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator conducted a cross-line mission to Wa'r and a submitted further request for an inter-agency convoy to Wa'r to the Syrian authorities.

14. Fighting in the southern governorates reported during October resulted in death and injury to civilians. In Dar'a governorate, Government airstrikes continued as did shelling between Government forces and non-State armed opposition groups. OHCHR received reports of several attacks with barrel bombs during the month, including an attack on Busra al-Sham on 21 October, which killed four children and two other civilians, and on Dael on 14 October which killed a pregnant woman and her one-year-old daughter. A child in the village of Barga was killed on 16 October by an explosive remnant of war. On 24 October, a vehicle-borne improvised explosive device was detonated by an unknown perpetrator around 300 meters from the national hospital in Tafas town in Dar'a.

15. Both Russian and United States-led coalition forces continued their operations in the Syrian Arab Republic throughout the month of October. On 8 October, an airstrike hit the Ferdous neighbourhood in the centre of Raqqah, hitting a vehicle and killing the driver and five of his family members, including one child. While Russian authorities and the United States-led coalition have acknowledged carrying out airstrikes in Raqqah governorate on that day, it is unclear who is responsible for this particular incident. In addition, OHCHR received a number of reports alleging that there had been civilian casualties as a result of airstrikes, in which reports the origin of the strikes could not, however, be adequately ascertained. On 3 October, an airstrike struck Ihsem in Idlib governorate, killing at least five civilians, including one woman and four children. A first responder was killed in a subsequent attack that took place soon after the first one and in the same area. On 9 October, airstrikes on Mayadin in Dayr al-Zawr governorate hit the area near Mayadin Hospital, killing one civilian who was in the vicinity. On 12 October, 12 civilians, including a child, were injured following an airstrike on Hayan, north-west of Aleppo. On 13 October, at least seven civilians were killed following an airstrike that hit a civilian area in Hayan. On 15 October, OHCHR received information that an airstrike hit a bakery,

killing eight civilians and damaging a nearby mosque in Tir Mallah, Homs. On 15 October, a strike allegedly hit a house in Ghanto, Homs, killing over 40 members of an extended family. On 27 October, multiple airstrikes in Asiya, al-Bawabiya, and Tel Hadiya in Aleppo governorate reportedly killed at least 22 civilians and injuring others.

16. Displacement continued throughout the Syrian Arab Republic in October. Over 190,000 people were displaced from various areas in Aleppo, Idlib, Hama, Homs, Rif Dimashq, Dayr al-Zawr, Raqqah and Dar'a governorates due to ongoing fighting.

17. Civilian infrastructure continued to be targeted during the reporting period. In Aleppo, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) recorded 10 days of water cuts during October (water remained cut as of 4 November), as well as persistent electricity cuts. On 23 October, a major water pipeline at Wadi Barada exploded, likely due to shelling in the vicinity and a general degradation of the pipes, resulting in the interruption of water supplies to parts of Damascus and to Qudsaya in Rif Dimashq.

18. There were developments regarding several local agreements during the reporting period. In Qudsaya, Rif Dimashq, reconciliation negotiations continued. According to reports, about 70 per cent of fighters in Qudsaya have surrendered their weapons and regularized their status through Government security branches; while the rest of fighters have so far refused to surrender their weapons. Government forces continued to close the main road to the district, with limited medical supplies, food or other assistance having reached the area in over two months. In Madamiyet, a separation wall with Darayya was built as part of an agreement with the representative of the Syrian Armed Forces in exchange for a promise to open the road leading to the town. However, restrictions on movement have reportedly not been lifted yet.

19. Following intense and constructive discussions in Vienna, the participants issued a joint communiqué encapsulating fundamental principles for a political solution and tasking the United Nations with the establishment of a negotiating process, bringing together the Government and the opposition as well as exploring modalities for a nationwide ceasefire to run in parallel with a renewed political process. The communiqué also stressed the importance of Syrian ownership of the political process.

B. Human rights

20. During the reporting period, OHCHR continued to receive allegations of arbitrary arrest and detention, sexual and gender-based violence, torture and other ill-treatment and deaths in custody as a result of torture or lack of medical care inside Government detention centres. OHCHR also received reports that Government intelligence personnel carried out house-to-house searches from 2 to 5 October in Damascus, Yabrud and Nubuk, arbitrarily detaining tens of people. OHCHR received reports that the Air Force Intelligence arrested a political activist affiliated with the Syrian Community Association on 23 October in Mabuja village in Homs governorate; his whereabouts is currently unknown.

21. Victims interviewed by OHCHR reported that they were subjected to torture and other ill-treatment at Military Intelligence Branches 291 and 215, and at the Palestine Branch of Military Intelligence in Damascus, the Nayrab Military Airport, the Mezze Military Airport, Sidnaya prison and at the headquarters of the 4th Division in Damascus. Witnesses also spoke of other detainees, including women, being subjected to torture in these facilities.

22. ISIL carried out unlawful detentions of tens of young men in Dayr al-Zawr governorate during the reporting period, entering local markets and Internet cafes to determine whether any of those present were “spying”. The detained men were taken to unknown locations. In Raqqah governorate, ISIL arrested a married couple in the Mashlab area on 5 October. They were accused of teaching mixed groups of male and female school children in their home. The whereabouts of the couple remains unknown.

23. ISIL continued to carry out executions of perceived spies and Government supporters without due process. On 10 October, three men accused of spying for the Government were executed in Palmyra. On 13 October, two men were publicly executed by gunfire, and a third man was executed in an isolated area; the three were also accused of spying for the Government. On 26 October, ISIL fighters tied three men to a pillar at one of the historical sites in Palmyra and detonated the pillars — the charges in their case were unknown. In Aleppo governorate, on 24 October, ISIL stoned two men to death in al-Bab town, north-east of Aleppo city, allegedly due to their sexual orientation. The execution took place after a summary “trial” in an ISIL-established court.

24. On 27 October, fighters with the Kurdish People’s Protection Units detained four young men in Smehen village in al-Hasakah for the purpose of forcibly recruiting them into the group. The whereabouts of the men remains unknown.

25. On 3 October, fighters from Jaish al-Islam raided the detention centre in the Jabhat al-Nusra-established courthouse in Yalda in Rif Dimashq governorate and captured five “convicted” detainees, publicly executing them in Kishik Square. Jaish al-Islam stated that they were retaliating for the use of an improvised explosive device which targeted five of their members in Yalda earlier the same day, although no group had claimed responsibility for the incident.

26. Several media outlets reported in early November that, amid continued airstrikes by the Government, Jaish al-Islam used dozens of prisoners, both men and women, as human shields in Duma and eastern Ghuta. Reports indicate that the prisoners, many of whom may have been religious minorities, were placed in cages around heavily populated areas to deter further airstrikes in civilian areas. Some of the prisoners have allegedly been in captivity since 2013, when they were kidnapped from Government-held areas in eastern Ghouta.

C. Humanitarian response

27. United Nations humanitarian agencies and partners continued to reach millions of people in need in October through all modalities from within the Syrian Arab Republic and across borders pursuant to resolutions 2165 (2014) and 2191 (2014). The World Food Programme (WFP) delivered food assistance for over four million people in 12 governorates. The World Health Organization (WHO) distributed

medicines and supplies for 717,000 treatments in 10 governorates. UNICEF reached over 5.3 million people with multi-sector support, including 3.5 million with water, sanitation and hygiene support, over 2.4 million with health support and almost 180,000 with education support. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) reached around 272,000 people with core relief items and protection services in 12 governorates. The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) delivered 330,000 reproductive health and gender-based violence services through implementing partners. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) reached almost 20,000 people with food and agricultural assistance. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) delivered basic relief items for over 32,500 people. The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) provided support to more than 330,000 Palestine refugees. The Government of the Syrian Arab Republic continued to provide basic services to areas under its control as well as in many areas beyond its control.

28. Cross-border deliveries continued during the reporting period. As of 31 October, the United Nations and its implementing partners had sent 207 shipments — 140 from Turkey and 67 from Jordan — to the Syrian Arab Republic under the terms of resolutions 2165 (2014) and 2191 (2014), including food assistance for over 2.4 million people; non-food items for 1.6 million people; medical supplies for almost four million treatments, as well as a number of surgical supply kits; and water and sanitation supplies for over one million people in Aleppo, Dar'a, Hama, Idlib, Ladhīqiyah and Qunaytirah governorates. In line with resolutions 2165 (2014) and 2191 (2014), the United Nations notified the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic in advance of each shipment, including the details of content, destination and number of beneficiaries.

29. The United Nations Monitoring Mechanism continued its operations in Jordan and Turkey. Since the start of operations, the Mechanism has monitored 207 United Nations humanitarian shipments consisting of 4,505 trucks, confirming the humanitarian nature of each and notifying the Syrian authorities after each shipment. The Mechanism continued to benefit from excellent cooperation with the Governments of Jordan and Turkey.

30. Three inter-agency convoys were completed during the month of October. On 8 October, the final phase of a three-part convoy to Hula in Homs was completed. A total of 60,000 people in hard-to-reach areas benefited from the convoy. Government authorities prohibited water, sanitation and hygiene items and some medical items from being loaded. On 18 October, humanitarian convoys of United Nations and other partners reached 10,000 people in Fu'ah and Kafraya, as well as some 20,000 people in Zabadani, Madaya and Buqayn with multi-sectoral assistance, including medical and surgical items.

31. United Nations agencies also undertook cross-line deliveries during the reporting period. For example, WFP reached over 12,000 people in non-State armed opposition group-controlled parts of Hama and Rif Dimashq governorates. FAO reached 3,000 people and distributed poultry packages in a cross-line delivery to Madimayet Elsham in Rif Dimashq. WHO provided 81,722 medical treatments through a local non-governmental organization partner across conflict lines in Aleppo governorate, including the use of a haemodialysis machine and 100 dialysis sessions in Nubul subdistrict. On 28 October, UNICEF completed its second

delivery of sodium hypochlorite to Raqqah; it is estimated that the supply will cover the water treatment needs for two million people for five months. Meanwhile, winter and education supplies for up to 12,000 people procured by UNICEF were delivered cross-line by the Syrian Arab Red Crescent to hard-to-reach locations in eastern Aleppo city during the last week of October. UNHCR undertook missions to Al Tall, Rif Dimashq, on 8 and 14 October, reaching some 5,000 people with basic relief items.

32. Both international and Syrian non-governmental organizations continued to deliver multi-sector assistance in the Syrian Arab Republic in October, including the provision of services, in line with previous months.

Humanitarian access

33. The delivery of humanitarian assistance to many of the 13.5 million people in need of assistance in the Syria Arab Republic remained extremely challenging in many areas due to active conflict and insecurity and deliberate obstruction by the parties, including continuing burdensome administrative procedures.

34. Access to the 4.5 million people living in hard-to-reach areas remained of critical concern. In October, United Nations agencies and partners reached 46 of the 147 hard-to-reach locations (31 per cent) overall. They reached 14 locations with food assistance for around 225,000 people, 18 locations with health support for over 130,000 medical treatments, 11 locations with water, sanitation and hygiene assistance for more than 50,000 people and 10 locations with relief items for almost 20,000 people. Nearly half of the people in hard-to-reach areas are in ISIL-controlled areas, to which the United Nations did not deliver assistance in October aside from water treatment materials provided by UNICEF.

35. Active conflict in several governorates hindered the effective delivery of humanitarian assistance, as well as people's access to essential services. For example, fighting and insecurity continued to prevent the delivery of life-saving food assistance to over 1.2 million people in parts of Rif Dimashq, rural Homs and rural Hama governorates in September. In Aleppo governorate, the western parts of Aleppo city remained inaccessible during the last week of October owing to the fact that ISIL had control over a stretch of the main Homs-Aleppo highway. As a result, in October, WFP was unable to deliver assistance for over 220,000 people in Aleppo. In response to the water crisis in Aleppo, UNICEF had been trucking clean drinking water to cover the needs of more than 700,000 people on a daily basis. However, reduced access to Aleppo as a result of ongoing fighting along access points to the south of the city forced UNICEF to temporarily downscale its water trucking operation to meet the needs of 200,000 people.

36. Deliberate interference and obstruction by the parties also continued to prevent aid delivery. For example, WFP continues to be unable to reach population in need in ISIL-controlled areas of the country, as all plans to deliver assistance to these areas have been suspended due to the inability to work independently and to monitor activities. This is preventing WFP assistance to an estimated 720,000 people in need of food assistance in almost all of Dayr al-Zawr and Raqqah governorates, parts of northern rural Aleppo and east rural Homs, as well as pockets in southern rural Hasakah and rural northwestern Hama governorates.

37. A limited number of humanitarian supplies went through the Nusaybin/Qamishli crossing in October. On 9 October, Turkish authorities gave approval for WFP to resume shipments via the crossing, while UNICEF was also approved to use the crossing to import \$2.5 million in life-saving supplies. Syrian authorities had approved these shipments to cross the border in September. On 16 October, the Government of Turkey informed humanitarian operations that all such operations through the crossing would remain temporarily on hold due to persistent insecurity in the areas surrounding the border crossing. On an exceptional basis, since the trucks had already left the warehouse, 10 UNICEF trucks loaded with 4,800 family hygiene kits were allowed through on 19 October. UNICEF is waiting to move approximately 80 trucks full of life-saving supplies through the crossing.

38. As of 31 October, 27 out of the 88 inter-agency requests made in 2015 by the United Nations have been approved, in principle, by the Syrian Ministry of Foreign Affairs; 45 requests are pending approval; and three requests have been put on hold by the United Nations due to insecurity. The remaining 13 requests were submitted previously, but they are being subsumed by newer requests. Nine of the original requests were put on hold by the United Nations due to insecurity and the other four requests, which went unanswered by the Government within a three-month time period, were resubmitted.

39. Of the 27 requests approved in principle by the Syrian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 13 convoys have been completed. Of the remaining 14 requests approved in principle, seven have been unable to proceed due to the lack of approval from the Syrian Government security forces; two are held up due to a lack of agreement between the United Nations, the Syrian Arab Red Crescent and the Government on the access route; two are stalled by the lack of approval by non-State armed opposition groups for safe passage; and one remains pending the security situation. The remaining two requests approved in principle are under preparation. More than 282,000 beneficiaries in hard-to-reach and besieged locations could be reached if these convoys were able to proceed.

40. In addition to inter-agency convoys, a number of requests from United Nations agencies for single agency convoys remain pending, owing to insecurity, until approval is received from the Syrian authorities. WFP had 21 unapproved requests by the Syrian Government in several locations in Dar'a and Rif Dimashq governorates during the reporting period, preventing the delivery of assistance to 109,000 people. UNHCR had nine requests rejected on account of insecurity. Out of 69 individual requests made by UNICEF in 2015 to gain access to hard-to-reach areas, only six have been approved by the Syrian authorities.

41. All UNRWA operations in Yarmouk remained suspended during the reporting period. The most recent UNRWA mission inside Yarmouk was conducted on 28 March. On 31 October, the Al Marhama International Campaign, in cooperation with the charitable association for the relief of Palestinian people, completed the distribution of 448 food parcels and baby formula to civilians inside Yarmouk. The distribution followed the delivery of 3,000 bags of bread to Yarmouk and Yalda on 21 and 25 October by the national commission for the relief of Palestinians in the Syrian Arab Republic. The passageway between Yarmouk and Yalda remains a volatile area. UNRWA was not permitted to conduct any missions to Yalda, Babila and Bayt Saham in October. Other humanitarian organizations have reportedly been allowed to continue their operations and to deliver assistance in these areas. The

Syrian Arab Red Crescent mobile clinics continue to provide services in the three areas, visiting each location every third week. Meanwhile, in response to increasing prevalence of typhoid, UNICEF, in collaboration with the rural Damascus health directorate, distributed aqua tabs to Yalda, Babila and Bayt Saham and to the Yarmouk camp in October. The authorities have also continued to authorize a limited range of commercial goods to enter these areas on a daily basis.

42. No major changes in the administrative procedures required by the Syrian Government for the delivery of humanitarian assistance were reported in September. The current administrative procedures continued to delay or limit the delivery of assistance by United Nations agencies and United Nations partners. UNICEF reported that while the lead time for obtaining approvals from the Syrian authorities regarding the importation of regular humanitarian goods had improved, UNICEF still has two outstanding exemptions for health and nutrition supplies for 117,000 children that have been pending for more than two months. UNICEF also reported significant delays in the length of time taken to obtain approvals for the importation of information technology and telecommunications equipment (7 exemptions are pending between 3 and 10 months).

43. Progress continued to be made with regard to visas for United Nations staff members. In October, the Syrian Government approved 69 visas for United Nations staff, of which 38 were new visas and 31 were renewals. Over 95 per cent of the approved visas in October were granted within the agreed 15 working day review period. As of 31 October, 47 United Nations visa requests (either new visas or renewals) remained pending, 11 of which were beyond the agreed 15 working day review period. One visa application was rejected in October. The total number of visas rejected in 2015 is 40, exclusive of the four United Nations staff who were declared *personae non grata* in February 2015.

44. One international non-governmental organization was authorized to operate in October, bringing the total number of international non-governmental organizations authorized to operate in the Syrian Arab Republic to 16. International non-governmental organizations continued to face a series of administrative hurdles and restrictions that impact on their ability to operate. They remain restricted in their ability to partner with national humanitarian organizations, open sub-offices, conduct missions, join inter-agency convoys and undertake independent needs assessments. Fifteen visas for staff of international non-governmental organizations remain pending as of 31 October, 11 of which were submitted in September or October. Six visas were approved in October, including four that were submitted during the same month. The United Nations Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator continues to lead discussions with the Government regarding visas and the operating framework for international non-governmental organizations.

45. In October, two additional national non-governmental organizations, both in Damascus governorate, were authorized by the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic to partner with United Nations organizations. Overall, the number of national non-governmental organizations authorized to partner with United Nations organizations stands at 137. The organizations operate through 220 branches. Authorized national non-governmental organizations continue to operate under complex procedures in partnering with United Nations agencies.

Besieged areas

46. Of the 4.5 million people living in hard-to-reach areas, some 393,700 remained besieged in the Syrian Arab Republic. This includes some 200,000 people in Dary al-Zawr city who are besieged by ISIL; some 181,200 people who are besieged by the Syrian Government in various locations in eastern Ghutah, as well as Darayya and Zabadani in rural Damascus; and some 12,500 people who are besieged by non-State armed opposition groups and the Nusra Front in Fu'ah and Kafraya in Idlib. The 26,500 people in Nubul and Zahra', in Aleppo governorate, are no longer considered to be besieged following consistent and credible reports that access to and from the enclave for people and commercial goods has significantly improved over the last three months, although access and protection concerns remain acute.

47. The parties to the conflict continued to entirely or heavily restrict access to besieged areas during the reporting period. During October, some 10,500 besieged people (2.7 per cent) were provided with food, health and basic relief assistance and some 16,700 besieged people (4.2 per cent) were provided with water, sanitation and hygiene assistance. The flow of commercial supplies through official routes remained largely blocked, leading to high prices for those commodities reaching besieged areas through unofficial and irregular supply lines. Freedom of movement remained heavily restricted, although certain groups, such as students and members of reconciliation councils, were occasionally allowed to leave from and return to some besieged areas.

48. In eastern Ghutah, Rif Dimashq, some 176,500 people are besieged in the following locations: Duma, Harasta, Arbin, Zamalka, Ain Tarma, Hammura, Jisrein, Kafr Batna, Saqba and Zabadani. No United Nations humanitarian assistance agency reached the besieged areas in eastern Ghutah during October, with the exception of UNICEF, which provided some 1,045 children with remedial education support in Duma.

49. In Zabadani, Rif Dimashq, some 500 people remain besieged by Government forces. On 18 October, the joint humanitarian convoy of United Nations personnel and other partners reached the city with food, basic relief items, water, sanitation and hygiene support and medicines.

50. In Darayya, Rif Dimashq, about 4,000 people remain besieged by Government forces. No United Nations assistance reached the areas during the reporting period. People in Darayya have not been assisted by the United Nations since October 2012.

51. In Fu'ah and Kafraya, Idlib governorate, some 12,500 people remain besieged by non-State armed opposition groups and the Nusra Front. On 18 October, the joint humanitarian convoy of United Nations personnel and other partners reached Fu'ah and Kafraya with food, basic relief items, water, sanitation and hygiene support, and medicines for 10,000 people.

52. In the Government-controlled western neighbourhoods of Dayr al-Zawr city, some 200,000 people are besieged by ISIL. The number of people under siege has been reduced, however, as some people have managed to flee from the area. In partnership with the Syrian Arab Red Crescent, UNICEF provided water, sanitation and hygiene support to 6,195 people and psychosocial support to 720 children during the month of October. With approvals secured, plans remain for an emergency inter-agency United Nations airlift to deliver life-saving humanitarian assistance to the area, but thus far clashes in the vicinity of the military airport have prevented the operation from proceeding.

Free passage of medical supplies, personnel and equipment

53. While health-care facilities have special protected status under international humanitarian law, attacks on medical facilities continue unabated in the Syrian Arab Republic. During the reporting period, United Nations and health partners received reports — in the process of being verified by the United Nations and partner organizations — of 13 attacks on medical facilities and transport; eight on hospitals, two on other types of health facilities; and three on ambulances. Seven of the attacks took place in Hama governorate, three in Aleppo, two in Homs and one in Idlib governorate. All of the attacks were by airstrikes. As a result of the attacks, 11 people were reportedly killed, two of which were health staff, and approximately 40 people were injured.

54. Access to medical care continued to be restricted by insecurity and restrictions imposed by parties to the conflict, resulting in increased prices for medicines, a shortage of medical supplies in local markets, a reduction in pharmaceutical production and a shortage of qualified medical workers. The shortage of qualified medical staff and the degradation of essential services have further impacted access to adequate medical care. The availability of life-saving health services are of critical concern, in parts of Hasakah, Raqqah, Dayr al-Zawr, Dar'a, Idlib, Hama and Aleppo governorates, as well as the hard-to-reach and besieged areas of Rif Dimashq governorate.

55. In collaboration with the Ministry of Health, UNICEF and WHO supported the sixteenth national polio vaccination campaign, held from 18 to 22 October, during which 2.3 million children were vaccinated. All governorates were covered with the exception of Raqqah, Dayr al-Zawr and some parts of Idlib due to a combination of insecurity and restricted access imposed by the parties to the conflict. For example, because of the refusal of ISIL to allow the campaign to take place in the parts of Raqqah and Dayr al-Zawr governorates under their control, only 1.6 per cent of children under five were vaccinated in Raqqah and only 4.5 per cent of children in Dayr al-Zawr under five years of age were treated for the disease. Overall, some 500,000 children could not be vaccinated across the country due to access constraints.

56. In October, five new requests from WHO and one reminder were submitted to the Syrian authorities for approval to deliver supplies to 13 hard-to-reach parts of Rif Dimashq, Hama, Dar'a, Aleppo, Dayr al-Zawr and Qunaytirah governorates. All requests have gone unanswered. In the meantime, United Nations and health sector partners continue to face extreme challenges in the delivery of medical supplies and the provision of preventative and curative services in ISIL-controlled areas.

Safety and security of staff and premises

57. A total of 30 United Nations staff members, 28 of whom are UNRWA staff, one from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and one from UNICEF, continue to be detained or missing. The total number of humanitarian workers killed in the conflict since March 2011 is 81. This includes 17 staff members of the United Nations, 48 staff members and volunteers of the Syrian Arab Red Crescent, eight volunteers and staff members of the Palestinian Red Crescent Society and eight staff members of international non-governmental organizations. Of the 81, 15 have been killed since 1 January 2015.

III. Observations

58. Throughout the Syrian Arab Republic, the fundamental rules of international humanitarian and human rights law are being violated with little or no accountability. I repeat my call that the situation in the Syrian Arab Republic be referred to the International Criminal Court. Tragically, hundreds of civilians have been killed or injured in direct or indiscriminate attacks this month alone due to the continued use of explosive weapons in populated areas, including barrel bombs, shelling and car bombs. The use of explosive weapons in populated areas will have a severe long-term impact on the Syrian Arab Republic, resulting from the destruction of housing, essential infrastructure and services on which civilians depend. Furthermore, the use of these weapons is leaving deadly explosive remnants of war across the country. These will continue to pose a serious threat to Syrian civilians, particularly children, long after the hostilities have ended. I have taken note of the commitment by the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic to refrain from using indiscriminate weapons and expect this commitment to be translated into action.

59. Continued attacks against health-care facilities, transports and personnel and the denial of care to the wounded and sick continue to be of grave concern. Attacks on facilities, transports and personnel have a devastating multiplier effect, not only killing and injuring, but also leaving many people unable to get the treatment that they desperately need. Many Syrians are now unable to obtain even the most basic levels of care. Meanwhile, it is inhumane and unlawful that medicines and medical supplies continue to be prevented from reaching their intended beneficiaries. The protection and provision of medical care to the wounded and sick under all circumstances is clearly enshrined in international humanitarian law.

60. While the security situation is deteriorating, humanitarian access to those most in need is not improving. The level of access for humanitarian agencies to the 4.5 million people in hard-to-reach areas and their inability to obtain essential humanitarian supplies and services remains unacceptable. I must again urge the parties, and in particular the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic, to honour their obligations under international humanitarian law and to act now. Security Council resolution 2139 (2014) leaves no room for interpretation or further negotiation. The parties must comply and facilitate the delivery of aid to civilians in need wherever they may be found in the Syrian Arab Republic.

61. In its resolution 2139 (2014), the Security Council also called upon the parties to lift the sieges of populated areas. This call has not been heard. It is shameful that nearly 400,000 people are being deliberately forced to live under siege conditions, largely without access to essential goods and services.

62. The scale of the devastation for the Syrian people has reached staggering proportions. There are now some 13.5 million people in need of some form of humanitarian or protection assistance, including some six million children. More than half of the people in the Syrian Arab Republic have been forced to leave their homes, and some 6.5 million people are internally displaced. Three out of every four Syrians is estimated to live in poverty. Health facilities, schools, markets and other essential services across the country are operating at reduced capacity, or are closed down. Living conditions for Syrians will only deteriorate further unless there is an end to the fighting.

63. I am encouraged that on 30 October, in Vienna, the international community finally re-engaged in the process of finding a political solution to the Syrian conflict. There is no military solution to this crisis. The Geneva communiqué remains the internationally agreed framework for a political settlement to the conflict, as reiterated by the Vienna communiqué. The latter is a first step in providing the opportunity for an expanded group of international stakeholders to further develop and elaborate this framework along the lines of the key principles of the Geneva communiqué. We need this type of renewed momentum, prompted by international re-engagement, in seeking a political settlement to the Syrian conflict. It is in this spirit that we should look at the Vienna communiqué as a promising development. I urge all parties to the conflict and the Member States with influence on those parties to further their engagement and spare no effort towards a political solution. As this report clearly highlights, Syrian civilians, including women and children, continue to bear the brunt of this conflict. The international community must come together to help Syrians find common ground and stop the violence.
