



**UNHCR**

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees  
Haut Commissariat des Nations Unies pour les réfugiés

**Remarks to the United Nations Security Council**  
**António Guterres, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees**  
**27 February 2013**

Mr. President,

We are facing a moment of truth in Syria. The humanitarian situation is dramatic beyond description. The refugee crisis is accelerating at a staggering pace, month after month.

In early April 2012, UNHCR had about 33,000 Syrian refugees on its books in the region. As of yesterday, we had registered – or given out registration appointments to – 936,000 Syrians across the Middle East and North Africa. Nearly 30 times as many people as ten months ago.

Since early January, over 40,000 people have fled Syria *every week*. Back in December, when we drew up our Regional Response Plan together with our 55 NGO partners, we expected to have 1.1 million Syrian refugees by June. If things continue to accelerate like this, it will take less than a month to reach that number. Just last night, and just into Jordan, 4585 fled the country.

In Lebanon, we know of nearly 315,000 Syrian refugees who are scattered across 700 municipalities. Many more Syrians have not yet presented themselves to UNHCR or the authorities, so the real number is probably well above 400,000. They have largely been absorbed into local communities, and the government is leading efforts to expand vital accommodation options for them all.

In Jordan, the number of Syrian refugees who have come forward for registration is over 300,000. One third have arrived in the last eight weeks and found shelter in Za'atri camp. Based on the recent dramatic increase in arrivals, the Government, UNHCR and partners are working to identify further camp sites. According to government estimates, well over 400,000 Syrians have entered Jordan since March 2011. Some 70% of them live in urban areas, thanks to the solidarity of local communities.

In Turkey, some 183,000 Syrians are now hosted in 17 government-built camps across eight provinces. The Government estimates that 100,000 more are living in urban centres and has recently started to register them.

In Iraq, still struggling with its own transition to stability, the number of Syrian refugees has passed 100,000. About 60 per cent live in non-camp settings, mainly in Dohuk, Erbil and Sulaymaniah in the North.

Some 37,000 Syrian refugees have been registered across North Africa, and more than 28,000 have sought asylum in Europe.

The most tragic consequences of the crisis are being felt inside Syria, as the Emergency Relief Coordinator has described. We also must not forget the half a million Palestinian refugees in Syria who are affected by the conflict. More than 30,000 have already been compelled to flee abroad, mainly to Lebanon. A massive displacement of Palestinian refugees from Syria would have devastating consequences on efforts to preserve asylum space in the region. Strong support to UNRWA's efforts is essential, and I appeal to all parties to the conflict to respect and protect the Palestinian refugee population in Syria.

The refugee numbers are staggering, but they cannot convey the full extent of the tragedy. Three quarters of the refugees are women and children. Many of them have lost family members. Most of them have lost everything they once owned – businesses, homes, livelihoods. They have been trying to cope with the harsh conditions of living in exile, during one of the most severe winters in many years.

The children pay the hardest price of all. Thousands of young lives have been shattered by this conflict, and the future generation of an entire country is marked by violence and trauma for many years to come.

And the refugees we meet are angry – including at the international community, whom they perceive as not having been able to solve a crisis that is now nearly two years old.

Mr. President,

The violence in Syria and the massive refugee exodus it has caused are having a huge impact on the society, the economy and the security of the host countries, who are sharing their increasingly meager resources with the refugees. The economic cost of this is tremendous and leads to complex social consequences. Countries of asylum have been very generous and kept their borders open, but their capacity to continue to do so is under severe pressure.

Lebanon has seen its population rise by a staggering 10% following the refugee influx. Apart from the obvious impact this has in a complex political situation, it has also put enormous pressure on available resources, in particular accommodation, health and education infrastructure.

Jordan is also facing a very difficult economic situation with a tight adjustment policy demanded by the IMF, aggravated by dwindling revenues from trade, tourism and foreign investment due to the Syria crisis. The country's limited energy and water resources and the social service infrastructure are dramatically overstretched.

Turkey's economic capacity is much stronger than those of other asylum countries, but the huge investments the country has made to assist Syrian refugees have taken a heavy toll. The government has spent hundreds of millions of dollars to set up 17 camps and is planning to open four more during the coming months.

International solidarity in support of the host countries must be urgently reinforced. This is not a question of generosity, but one of enlightened self-interest. By taking in thousands of new refugees every day, the countries on the frontline of this crisis are doing the region and indeed, the world, an extraordinary service. Helping them deal with the consequences of the refugee crisis is imperative, as the preservation of their economic and social stability is in everyone's essential interest.

Mr. President,

With the second-year anniversary of the Syria crisis approaching, we need to be prepared for the situation to deteriorate further before it gets any better. If the existing worst-case scenarios materialize, the international community will need to engage in an even more significant humanitarian response. Combined with the real risk of the conflict spilling over across the region, as well as the challenges posed by other lingering crises nearby, what is happening in Syria today risks escalating very quickly into a disaster that could overwhelm the international response capacity – political, security-related and humanitarian. This must not be allowed to happen.

Thank you very much.