

STATEMENT TO THE PRESS ON SYRIA
UNDER-SECRETARY-GENERAL FOR HUMANITARIAN AFFAIRS AND
EMERGENCY RELIEF COORDINATOR, VALERIE AMOS

New York, Monday 12 March 2012

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Thank you very much.

I have just completed a two-day visit to Syria. My purpose was to seek agreement on arrangements that would enable humanitarian organizations to reach people in areas affected by intense fighting and violence.

In Damascus I met the Syrian Foreign Minister, the Deputy Foreign Minister, and the Ministers for Health and Education, I raised my deep concerns regarding the humanitarian situation with them and put a proposal to the Government to conduct needs assessments to get a better sense of what was happening in the country. I also supported the ICRC's call for a daily humanitarian pause.

I was able to visit Homs and parts of the suburb of Baba Amr, accompanied by the Syrian Arab Red Crescent, so that I could see for myself the impact of the fighting.

In Baba Amr I was horrified by the destruction I saw. No building was untouched and there was clear evidence of use of heavy artillery and tanks. Baba Amr was almost deserted. A few people in tears, as they tried to salvage a few possessions.

I am extremely concerned as to the whereabouts of the people who have been displaced from Baba Amr by the shelling and other violence.

I was told that some fifty to sixty thousand people used to live in the area. We need to know what has happened to them, where they are now and what they need. We also need to know where the wounded are and whether they are receiving treatment.

The Government of Syria has said they need more time to consider my proposals and they themselves proposed a joint and initial humanitarian assessment exercise to take place towards the end of this week.

This is a minimal start. We need much, much more.

We need a robust and regular arrangement, which allows humanitarian organizations unhindered access - and time - to assess humanitarian needs.

And of course we then need access to allow us to evacuate the wounded and deliver desperately needed supplies; immediately and without danger to humanitarian workers or the people they are trying to reach.

After I left Syria on Friday, I went to Turkey, where I had the opportunity to see the facilities for displaced Syrians in Hatay province on the Turkish side of the border. These facilities currently host around 12,000 Syrian refugees in seven camps and there are up to 250 new arrivals every day.

I talked to people who had recently arrived from Syria who said that they had had to flee for their lives during Government military operations. They demanded that the international community take action to stop the violence in Syria.

I also met the Turkish Foreign Minister and we discussed regional contingency planning efforts. I had consultations with the Lebanese and Jordanian Governments when I was in the region prior to my visit to Syria.

I commend all three Governments for keeping their borders open for people in distress and for providing relief to them in a sustained manner.

Since I was in Syria we have heard and seen disturbing new reports of shelling and tank fire in other cities, including Idlib in the north, and reports of civilian casualties.

The people of Syria need our help. They want peace, security and stability so that they can get on with their lives.

We must do everything we can to stop the violence – and end the suffering of people caught in the conflict.