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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-second 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 the Secretary-General to report, every 30 days, on the implementation of the resolutions by all parties to the conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic.

2. The information contained herein is based on the data available to United Nations agencies on the ground, from the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic and from open sources. Data from United Nations agencies on their humanitarian deliveries have been reported for the period from 1 September to 30 November 2015. More recent data have been included, where available.

II. Major developments

A. Political/military

3. Widespread conflict and high levels of violence continued throughout the Syrian Arab Republic in November. Indiscriminate and disproportionate aerial bombings and ground attacks in places with a large civilian presence, including the use of barrel bombs by government forces and indiscriminate shelling by non-State armed opposition groups and designated terrorist groups,¹ continued to kill, injure and displace civilians. The conduct of hostilities by all parties to the conflict continued to be characterized by a widespread disregard for international humanitarian law and the obligation of all parties to protect civilians.

4. Heavy fighting continued to be reported in Damascus and Rif Dimashq during the reporting period. Government forces carried out several offensives. For example, on 25 November, government forces advanced towards the village of

* Reissued for technical reasons on 18 December 2015.

¹ On 30 May 2013, the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and the Nusra 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.



Marj al-Sultan and regained control of the strategic Marj Sultan-Hawash road. In eastern Ghutah, the town of Duma was repeatedly hit by government forces, with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) documenting at least four attacks between 2 and 22 November. According to sources on the ground, a minimum of 43 civilians, including 12 children, were killed and many more injured by the airstrikes. Elsewhere in Rif Dimashq, six air-to-surface missiles hit a residential area connecting the towns of Saqba and Hamouria on 7 November, killing two women and three children. OHCHR received reports of frequent attacks in Darayya. For example, on 8 November, six civilians were killed and three others injured when government helicopters reportedly dropped barrel bombs on the town. On 21 November, four civilians, including two children, were killed and at least 10 more injured in a similar attack in Darayya.

5. Non-State armed opposition groups continued to launch mortars and to shell Damascus city during the reporting period. OHCHR reported that, on 7 November, one civilian was killed when mortars hit the al-Adawi area of Damascus city. On 10 November, according to OHCHR sources, two civilians were killed and 11 others injured when mortar rounds fell onto the Qassa', Bab-Tuma and Bab al-Salam areas of Damascus city. Separately, on 12 November, eight civilians, including six children, were reportedly injured when a mortar struck a school in the Bab-Tuma neighbourhood of Damascus. According to reports by the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic, non-State armed opposition groups shelled Government-controlled areas in Damascus city with more than 28 mortars during the first week of November, which reportedly killed two persons and injured 14 others. From 9 to 13 November, Damascus was also hit by 76 mortar attacks, reportedly killing three people and injuring 32 others. From 19 to 23 November, the city was the target of 87 mortar attacks in several neighbourhoods, which reportedly killed 5 persons and injured 45 others.

6. On 15 November, according to sources on the ground, ISIL launched an offensive against non-State armed opposition groups, including Jaysh al-Islam (Army of Islam), in Yalda city, south of Damascus, making some minor advances in the western parts of the city, in particular in the al-Hajar al-Aswad and al-Zein neighbourhoods. The advance caused an unknown number of families to flee the area into Yalda. Non-State armed opposition groups mounted a counter-attack days later, capturing areas around al-Hajar al-Aswad. As a consequence, representatives from key non-State armed opposition groups imposed restrictions on the movement of civilians between Yalda and Yarmouk, limiting it to 10 hours per day. The route between Yalda and Yarmouk was also closed for a 24-hour period on 12 November. Restrictions on movement were lifted in early December.

7. During the reporting period, intensified fighting between the parties to the conflict continued in the northern governorates of the Syrian Arab Republic. On 10 November, government forces retook Kweiris airbase in the western countryside of Aleppo. Government forces have since made limited advances on ISIL, towards the village of Dayr Hafir. In the northern countryside of Aleppo, non-State armed opposition groups made advances on ISIL, seizing two small villages, Harjalah and Dahla, reportedly with support from Turkey and the coalition led by the United States of America.

8. On 13 and 14 November, government forces advanced against non-State armed opposition groups in the southern countryside of Aleppo, gaining control of

additional territories, including the villages of al-Hader and al-Eis, less than 3 km from the Aleppo-Hama highway. On 23 November, non-State armed opposition groups conducted a counter-attack, restoring their control over several hilltops and villages in the area. Between 3 and 22 November, OHCHR documented the killing of at least 40 civilians, including five children, in five separate attacks by government forces in different parts of Aleppo governorate, including the towns of Hayan, Kafr Karma and Qanatir, in addition to the opposition-controlled neighbourhoods of Aleppo city. OHCHR also reported that, in Aleppo city on 23 November, non-State armed opposition groups fired dozens of mortars on the civilian-populated area of Sheikh Maqsoud, which is controlled by Kurdish forces, reportedly killing at least seven civilians.

9. On 24 November, a Russian warplane was shot down by Turkey close to the Syrian-Turkish border. While Turkey asserted that the warplane was flying in Turkish airspace when it was shot down, the Russian Federation denied that and said the warplane was flying in the airspace of the Syrian Arab Republic. The United Nations does not have independent means of verification to certify the claim of either Member State. The Russian Federation officially invited international experts to take part in the opening of the “black box” of the Russian plane.

10. Fighting continued between government forces and non-State armed opposition groups in the northern countryside of Homs governorate. On 23 November, government forces made significant advances against ISIL in the eastern countryside of Homs, gaining control over the cities of Hawarin and Mahin. Advances by government forces were reportedly supported by Russian air strikes on ISIL positions, including in Palmyra city and al-Qaryatayn.

11. In Ladhqiyyah, in the north-western part of the Syrian Arab Republic, fighting intensified between government forces and non-State armed opposition groups, causing casualties and displacement among civilians. OHCHR sources reported that, on 10 November, at least 17 civilians were killed and dozens injured following two mortar attacks by non-State armed opposition groups on the city of Ladhqiyyah. On 16 November, government forces launched a ground offensive, reportedly with the support of joint Russian-Syrian air strikes, against Ghamam, Zwawik, al-Dighmshlya and Dayr Hanna. On 17 November, non-State armed opposition groups recaptured Dayr Hanna, while on 19 November government forces regained control of several hills in the northern part of Turkmen Mountain.

12. Reports indicate that heavy air strikes were carried out by France, the Russian Federation and the United States-led coalition in Raqqah governorate during the reporting period, including repeated targeting of the New Raqqah bridge, public buildings and other critical infrastructure. The air strikes also led to interruptions in electricity and water service in Raqqah city. The National Hospital in Raqqah city has been closed since 4 November, after air strikes damaged the facility and forced patients to be relocated to neighbouring facilities. Separately, ISIL fired three medium-range missiles on 10 November, hitting villages located south of Tall Abyad and reportedly killing four civilians, including a child in Sakhrat Abdel Sheikh.

13. In Hasakah governorate, the newly established anti-ISIL, Arab-Kurdish coalition known as the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) launched an offensive on ISIL on 30 October. On 13 November, SDF seized the strategic village of al-Hole,

reportedly with support from the United States-led coalition, and cut the main ISIL-controlled highway between Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic.

14. There were reports of fighting in Dar'a governorate during the reporting period. According to OHCHR sources, on 19 November, at least 20 civilians, including women and children, were killed when government forces fired a rocket at an olive press located along the road linking Dar'a city and Sheikh Miskine. On the same day, seven civilians, including four children, were reportedly killed in Sheikh Miskine in an attack said to have involved barrel bombs.

15. French, Russian and United States-led coalition forces continued their operations in the Syrian Arab Republic throughout the month. OHCHR reported that, between 23 and 26 November, Russian authorities confirmed that they had carried out 134 military sorties against 499 targets in the governorates of Aleppo, Damascus, Dayr al-Zawr, Hama, Homs, Idlib, Ladhqiyyah and Raqqah. At the same time, the United States Central Command confirmed that it had conducted at least 132 air strikes in the governorates of Aleppo, Dayr al-Zawr, Hasakah and Raqqah in November. OHCHR received a number of reports alleging that the air strikes had resulted in civilian casualties; the origin of the strikes could not, however, be adequately ascertained. On 2 November, two air strikes reportedly hit al-Kasrat village in Raqqah governorate, killing nine civilians, including a child. In al-Soura town in Dar'a governorate, an air strike reportedly killed six civilians on 28 November. In Dayr al-Zawr governorate, a local market in Albu Kamal was hit by two air strikes on 5 November. According to OHCHR sources, 96 civilians, including women and children, were killed in the attack, and at least 124 civilians were injured. On 20 November, at least 50 civilians, including women and children, were killed and many others injured when fighter jets carried out numerous air strikes on several areas in Dayr al-Zawr. In Hasakah, three civilians were reportedly killed and one woman was seriously injured on 10 November when an air strike hit al-Buthah.

16. Civilian displacement continued throughout the Syrian Arab Republic in November, with over 121,500 people displaced from areas in Aleppo, Dar'a, Dayr al-Zawr, Hama, Hasakah, Homs, Idlib, Ladhqiyyah and Raqqah governorates. For example, in Aleppo, intensified fighting in the governorate further displaced some 30,000 people who had already been displaced from the Jabal as Samman subdistrict to Idlib governorate. Additionally, 10,000 people fled the southern countryside of Aleppo to al-Atarib. In Hama, some 6,000 people fled from Kafr Zayta, Madiq Castle, Hamra and Suran to Hama city during the first week of November owing to intensified air strikes. In Ladhqiyyah, more than 10,000 people were reportedly displaced by fighting between government forces and their allies and non-State armed opposition groups.

17. Civilian infrastructure continued to be targeted during the reporting period. In Aleppo city, the al-Khafseh water treatment and intake facility on the Euphrates River, located in an ISIL-controlled area, was hit by air strikes on 26 November. The entire facility was shut down for one day, cutting off water supplies to 3.5 million people in Aleppo governorate, including over 1 million children, before resuming partial operation the following day. Approximately 1.4 million people continue to be cut off from water supplies in rural Aleppo as a result of the incident. In Idlib governorate, a large-capacity mill and a bakery serving 50,000 people per day in Saraqib town in Idlib was hit by air strikes on 27 November. The following day, air strikes hit another bakery that supplied more than 50,000 people a day, as well as a water-pumping station in Ma'aret Numan town in southern Idlib. At least five schools were reportedly hit in eastern Ghutah between 2 and 25 November,

causing significant damage to their facilities. On 19 November, a number of medical clinics were also damaged, including one in Duma and another in Irbin.

18. During the reporting period, there were developments regarding a number of local agreements. In Qadsiya city, north-east of Damascus, the Government and non-State armed opposition groups reportedly signed a new local agreement that included provisions on the delivery of humanitarian assistance, the release of detainees, freedom of movement, the evacuation of fighters and the resumption of public services. Under the auspices of the agreement, the Syrian Arab Red Crescent relocated a total of 139 unarmed fighters to Idlib governorate. In the Wa'r district of Homs city, negotiations between non-State armed opposition groups and government officials resulted in an agreement that includes the evacuation of at least 300 fighters and their family members, the surrender of medium and heavy weapons and the provision of humanitarian assistance to people in need.

19. The week before the second meeting of the International Syria Support Group, 44 non-State armed opposition groups, including Jaysh al-Islam, met in Istanbul and agreed to form a united military council for all of the Syrian Arab Republic. A number of the participating groups subsequently met with the National Coalition of Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces umbrella group on 13 November to coordinate positions for future negotiations under the Vienna process. Several non-State armed opposition groups from the southern part of the Syrian Arab Republic met with representatives of the military operations centre in Jordan to discuss the implications of the Vienna meetings.

B. Human rights

20. The scale and severity of abuses and violations of international human rights and humanitarian law remained grave during the reporting period. OHCHR continued to receive allegations and to document cases of arbitrary detention, sexual and gender-based violence, torture and other forms of ill-treatment and deaths while in custody inside government detention centres. On 17 November, according to information gathered by OHCHR, inmates in Homs Central Prison protested against the ill-treatment of prisoners. Prison guards reportedly used live ammunition and tear gas in an attempt to put down the protest, injuring some of the prisoners.

21. OHCHR reported on incidents of women being detained by the “al-Khansaa women” and al-Hisba factions of ISIL in Dayr al-Zawr. The reasons for their detention included, but were not limited to, violating the ISIL-imposed dress code for women and adultery. Reports were also received by OHCHR of men being detained for not paying *zakat*, delaying prayer time and shaving their faces.

22. On 2 November, ISIL reportedly crucified and killed a man accused of robbery near the “Big Mosque” in Albu Kamal town in Dayr al-Zawr governorate. On the same day, ISIL reportedly beheaded an 80-year-old man in al-Mayishiya village who had been accused of blasphemy.

23. In Raqqah governorate, ISIL continued to impose heavy restrictions on civilian movement outside the governorate, reportedly denying requests by some communities to leave and placing considerable taxes on travel. These impediments have reportedly interfered with attempts by civilians to flee Raqqah in recent weeks amid heavy air strikes.

C. Humanitarian response

24. United Nations humanitarian agencies and partners continued to reach millions of people in need between 1 September and 30 November 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 an average of 3.8 million people per month. The World Health Organization (WHO) distributed medicines and supplies sufficient for an average of 700,000 treatments per month. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) provided an average of 4.3 million people per month with multisectoral support, including water, sanitation and hygiene services and supplies for 4.2 million people, and routine immunizations, polio vaccines and health-care services to 3.34 million children and mothers. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) provided an average of 247,226 people per month with core relief items. An additional 55,000 people per month received protection services. United Nations Population Fund partners delivered reproductive health services and services relating to gender-based violence to around 102,000 people per month on average. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations reached 310,000 people with food and agricultural assistance from 1 September to 30 November. The International Organization for Migration delivered basic relief items for nearly 40,000 people per month. The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) provided support to more than 200,000 Palestine refugees per month. The Government of the Syrian Arab Republic continued to provide basic services to areas under its control as well as to many areas beyond its control.

25. Cross-border deliveries continued during the reporting period. As at 30 November, the United Nations and its implementing partners had sent 222 shipments — 72 from Jordan and 150 from Turkey — to the Syrian Arab Republic under the terms of resolutions 2165 (2014) and 2191 (2014). These shipments included food assistance for over 2.4 million people, non-food items for 1.6 million people, water and sanitation supplies for 1.3 million people and medical supplies sufficient for 4.1 million treatments in six 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 its contents, its destination and the number of beneficiaries. Between 26 and 29 November, air strikes hit major supply routes into the Syrian Arab Republic, temporarily interrupting humanitarian programmes and blocking commerce with populated areas through the key border crossings of Bab al-Hawa and Bab al-Salam.

26. The United Nations Monitoring Mechanism continued its operations in Jordan and Turkey. During the reporting period, it monitored 48 United Nations humanitarian shipments, confirming the humanitarian nature of each and notifying the Syrian authorities after each shipment. The Monitoring Mechanism continued to benefit from excellent cooperation with the Governments of Jordan and Turkey.

27. Three inter-agency, cross-line convoys were completed during the past quarter. In September and October, an inter-agency cross-line convoy to Hula in Homs was completed in three phases, reaching 60,000 people in hard-to-reach locations. Also in October, inter-agency convoys brought multisectoral assistance, including medical and surgical items, to 10,000 people in Fu'ah and Kafraya and to 20,000 people in Zabadani, Madaya and Buqayn. No inter-agency convoys were

conducted in November. On 5 December, the first leg of a three-part convoy delivered life-saving supplies to 25,000 beneficiaries in the Al-Wa'r neighbourhood of Homs city. The convoy delivered all the planned health, food, nutrition and non-food items, except for surgical supplies, which the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic did not permit to be included in the convoy. The prohibited surgical materials would have assisted more than 24,480 beneficiaries.

28. United Nations agencies also undertook cross-line deliveries during the reporting period. For example, in November, WHO, through local non-governmental organization (NGO) partners, provided 317,946 medical treatments across conflict lines, including in Aleppo, Idlib and Hasakah governorates. UNICEF delivered sodium hypochlorite to Raqqah during October to cover the water treatment needs of up to 2 million people for five months. In November, UNICEF dispatched micronutrient sachets to Raqqah for 24,000 children. During the same month, WFP provided food assistance to 20,000 people in parts of the al-Kiswah subdistrict in Rif Dimashq controlled by non-State armed opposition groups. UNHCR continued to reach people in need in hard-to-reach locations during the reporting period, including 5,000 people in At Tall and 2,500 people in al-Kiswah in Rif Damashq in November.

29. Both international and Syrian non-governmental organizations continued to deliver multisectoral assistance, including services, in the Syrian Arab Republic during the reporting period.

Humanitarian access

30. The delivery of humanitarian assistance to many of the 13.5 million people in need of assistance in the Syrian Arab Republic remained extremely challenging in many areas owing to active conflict and insecurity and the imposition of deliberate restrictions, including burdensome administrative procedures, by parties to the conflict.

31. Access to the 4.5 million people living in hard-to-reach locations remained of critical concern. Between 1 September and 30 November, United Nations agencies and partners reached an average of 47 (32 per cent) of the 147 hard-to-reach locations per month (in October, the number of locations designated as hard-to-reach was revised from 127 to 147). United Nations agencies reached 20 locations on average per month with food assistance for over 240,000 people, 23 locations with health support for 373,000 medical treatments, 7 locations with water, sanitation and hygiene for 144,000 people, and 7 locations with core relief items for over 30,000 people. Over the past three months, of the 147 hard-to-reach locations, 55 were not reached at all, 60 were reached once, 18 were reached twice and 14 were reached three times. Compared with the two previous quarters, there was no tangible improvement in the number of hard-to-reach locations accessed between September and November.

32. Active conflict in several governorates hindered the effective delivery of humanitarian assistance as well as people's access to essential services. For example, in western Aleppo, fighting between government forces, ISIL and the Nusrah Front hindered the delivery of food assistance to 233,000 people between 23 October and 7 November. Fighting and air strikes also significantly affected humanitarian access, particularly in Homs and Hama, where roads were frequently closed or disrupted. This resulted in delays in WFP food deliveries for 63,000 people

in Idlib and Aleppo governorates, which had been scheduled for shipping in early December.

33. Deliberate interference and restrictions by the parties to the conflict also continued to prevent the delivery of aid. WFP continues to be unable to reach people in need in ISIL-controlled areas of the country, as all plans to deliver assistance to those areas have been suspended owing to the inability to work independently and to monitor activities. This affects some 720,000 people in almost all of Dayr al-Zawr and Raqqah governorates, parts of northern rural Aleppo and eastern rural Homs, as well as pockets of southern rural Hasakah and north-western rural Hama.

34. A limited number of humanitarian supplies went through the Nusaybin/Qamishli crossing during the reporting period. In addition, to the 10 UNICEF trucks loaded with 4,800 family hygiene kits that were allowed through on 19 October, the Government of Turkey granted approval to deliver food and non-food items through the crossing from 30 November to 31 December 2015.

35. As at 30 November, 27 out of the 91 inter-agency requests made in 2015 by the United Nations had been approved in principle by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Syrian Arab Republic; 48 requests were pending approval and 3 requests had been put on hold by the United Nations owing to insecurity. The remaining 13 requests had been submitted previously, but have been subsumed by newer requests.

36. 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, 7 have been unable to proceed owing to the lack of approval from Syrian Government security forces; 2 have been held up owing to a lack of agreement among the United Nations, the Syrian Arab Red Crescent and the Government on the access route; 2 have been stalled by the lack of approval on the part of non-State armed opposition groups for safe passage; and 1 remains on hold pending a change in the security situation. The remaining two requests that have been 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.

37. All UNRWA operations in Yarmouk remained suspended during the reporting period. The most recent UNRWA mission to Yarmouk was conducted on 28 March. The most recent missions by UNRWA to Yalda, explicitly authorized only for health-care interventions related to the typhoid outbreak, took place from 18 August to 24 September. Owing to active conflict, insecurity and a lack of authorization, UNRWA was not able to conduct any missions to Yalda, Babila and Bayt Saham in October and November. Other humanitarian organizations were reportedly allowed to continue their operations and to deliver assistance to Yalda, Babila and Bayt Saham in September. WFP, for instance, delivered food assistance for 15,000 people in those areas in September. Mobile clinics run by the Syrian Arab Red Crescent continue to provide services in those three areas, visiting each location every third week. In October and November, in response to the increasing prevalence of typhoid, UNICEF, in collaboration with the health directorate in Rif Dimashq, distributed aqua tabs in Yalda, Babila, Bayt Saham and Yarmouk. A limited range of commercial goods continues to enter the Yalda, Babila and Bayt Saham areas on a daily basis.

38. The administrative procedures currently in place have continued to delay or limit the delivery of assistance by United Nations agencies and their partners. On 12 November, food import regulations were revised to require that import documents for humanitarian food assistance needed to be notarized by the Syrian embassies in the countries of product origin. The procedure had previously applied only to commercial goods. The new procedure has put the delivery of food assistance for over 4 million people at risk of being suspended in December. Although there has been a reduction in the amount of lead time needed to obtain approval from the Syrian Ministry of Foreign Affairs for the importation of health and nutrition goods, there are still two outstanding exemptions for UNICEF health and nutrition supplies for 117,000 children that have been pending for more than three months.

39. As at 30 November, 42 United Nations visa requests (for either new visas or renewals) were pending, of which 22 were within the 15-working-days limit and 20 exceeded the limit. In November, 59 visas were approved. In 2015, a total of 43 visas have been rejected, excluding those of the four United Nations staff who were declared *personae non gratae* in February. This stands in contrast with 28 visa rejections in all of 2014.

40. A total of 16 international NGOs have been authorized to operate in the Syrian Arab Republic. These NGOs continue to face a series of administrative hurdles and restrictions that have an impact on their ability to operate. They remain restricted in their ability to partner with national humanitarian organizations, to open sub-offices, to conduct missions, to join inter-agency convoys and to undertake independent needs assessments. Seven visas for international NGO staff remained pending as at 30 November, and seven applications were approved in November.

41. The number of national NGOs authorized to partner with United Nations organizations increased from 131 (operating through 214 branches) to 138 (operating through 221 branches) between 1 September and 30 November. Seven national NGOs were added to the list: two in Rif Dimashq, one in Aleppo, one in Ladhīqiyah and three in Damascus. Authorized national NGOs continue to operate under complex procedures in partnering with United Nations agencies.

Besieged areas

42. Of the 4.5 million people living in hard-to-reach areas, some 393,700 remain besieged in the Syrian Arab Republic. This includes some 200,000 people in Dayr al-Zawr city who are besieged by ISIL; some 181,200 people who are besieged by the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic in various locations in eastern Ghutah, as well as in Darayya and Zabadani in Rif Dimashq; and some 12,500 people who are besieged by non-State armed opposition groups and the Nusrah Front in Fu'ah and Kafraya in Idlib governorate.

43. The parties to the conflict continued to entirely or heavily restrict access to besieged areas during the reporting period. In September, some 7,800 people were reached with water, sanitation and hygiene assistance in one besieged location. In October, 10,500 people in besieged locations were provided with food, health and basic relief assistance and some 16,700 people were provided with water, sanitation and hygiene assistance. In November, 1,077 children received textbooks and 50 children were provided with winter clothes. No other assistance reached the besieged areas in November. The flow of commercial supplies through official

routes remained largely blocked, leading to high prices for 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 and return to some besieged areas.

44. In eastern Ghutah, Rif Dimashq, some 176,500 people are besieged in the following locations: Duma, Harasta, Irbin, Zamalka, ‘Ayn Tarma, Hammura, Jisrayn, Kafr Batna, Siqba and Zabadin. During the reporting period, no United Nations humanitarian assistance agency reached the besieged areas in eastern Ghutah with the exception of UNICEF, which provided remedial educational support to some 1,045 children in Duma in October and winter clothes to 50 children in Irbin and Kafr Batna in November.

45. In Zabadani, in Rif Dimashq, some 500 people remain besieged by government forces. On 18 October, a joint humanitarian convoy of United Nations personnel and other partners reached the city with food, basic relief items, water, sanitation and hygiene support and medicine for 20,000 people. No other assistance reached that area during the reporting period.

46. In Darayya, in Rif Dimashq, some 4,000 people remain besieged by government forces. No United Nations assistance reached that area during the reporting period. People in Darayya have not been assisted by the United Nations since October 2012.

47. In Fu’ah and Kafraya, in Idlib governorate, some 12,500 people remain besieged by non-State armed opposition groups and the Nusrah Front. On 18 October, a 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 medicine for 10,000 people.

48. In the government-controlled western neighbourhoods of Dayr al-Zawr city, some 200,000 people are besieged by ISIL. In September, in partnership with the Syrian Arab Red Crescent, UNICEF distributed hygiene supplies and conducted hygiene promotion activities for some 7,800 people in the besieged part of the city. In October, 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. In November, UNICEF provided textbooks to support children in Dayr al-Zawr city, 1,077 of which were delivered to the besieged neighbourhood of al-Qusur. With approvals secured, plans remain for an emergency inter-agency United Nations airlift to deliver life-saving humanitarian assistance to the area. Thus far, however, clashes in the vicinity of the military airport have prevented the operation from proceeding.

Free passage of medical supplies, personnel and equipment

49. 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 had an additional impact on access to medical care. The availability of life-saving health services is of critical concern in parts of Aleppo, Dar’a, Dayr al-Zawr, Hasakah, Hama, Idlib and Raqqah

governorates, as well as in the hard-to-reach and besieged areas of Rif Dimashq governorate.

50. The risk of waterborne disease outbreaks is declining with the end of the summer season, but continues to be a major health risk throughout the northern part of the Syrian Arab Republic owing to gaps in the availability of safe water supplies. The risk of a cholera outbreak is declining thanks to effective prevention and preparedness activities, but the public health concern continues for the northern part of the country, especially for displaced persons living in camps and for populations in ISIL-controlled areas in Dayr al-Zawr and Raqqah governorates.

51. From 18 to 22 October, in collaboration with the Ministry of Health of the Syrian Arab Republic, UNICEF and WHO supported the sixteenth nationwide polio campaign, reaching 2.3 million children. All governorates were covered with the exception of Raqqah and Dayr al-Zawr, owing to the refusal by ISIL to allow the campaign to take place in the parts of those governorates under its control, where only 1.6 per cent and 4.5 per cent, respectively, of children under five years of age were reached. Between 22 and 26 November, in collaboration with the Ministry of Health, UNICEF and WHO launched a subnational polio vaccination campaign targeting 597,000 children under 5 in high-risk areas across the country, with limited access to areas controlled by ISIL. Results are expected to be known by the end of December.

52. In November, WHO submitted four new requests and three reminders to the Syrian authorities for approval to deliver supplies to 33 hard-to-reach parts of 10 governorates (Aleppo, al-Suwayda', Damascus, Dar'a, Dayr al-Zawr, Homs, Idlib, Qunaytirah, Raqqah and Rif Dimashq). All of the requests remain pending. In the meantime, United Nations and health sector partners continue to face extreme challenges in the delivery of medical supplies and the provision of preventive and curative services in ISIL-controlled areas.

Safety and security of staff and premises

53. A total of 29 United Nations staff members, including 27 from UNRWA, 1 from the United Nations Development Programme and 1 from UNICEF, continue to be detained or missing. A total of 81 humanitarian workers have been killed in the conflict since March 2011. This includes 17 staff members of the United Nations, 48 staff members and volunteers of the Syrian Arab Red Crescent, 8 volunteers and staff members of the Palestinian Red Crescent Society and 8 staff members of international NGOs. Of the 81, 15 have been killed since 1 January 2015.

III. Observations

54. As fighting in the Syrian Arab Republic continues unabated, millions of ordinary Syrians are bearing the consequences of this abhorrent crisis. Over a quarter of a million people have lost their lives, and more than half of all Syrians have had to leave their homes in search of a safe place. In December alone, hundreds of civilians have been killed and thousands have been displaced, many of them for the second or the third time. The crisis continues to be characterized by a complete disregard for international human rights law and international humanitarian law, in particular with regard to the treatment of civilians, including women and children, in the conduct of hostilities. I urge all the parties to the

conflict to halt deliberate or indiscriminate attacks against civilians and the use of explosive weapons in populated areas. The deliberate targeting of civilians is a war crime and those responsible must be held accountable. I repeat my call for the situation in the Syrian Arab Republic to be referred to the International Criminal Court. I regret that, despite the declaration by the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic, in its statement of 9 November, that it would refrain from using indiscriminate weapons, such incidents continued to be reported in November. I expect the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic to deliver on its commitments and translate them into firm action without delay.

55. I am also deeply concerned over the alleged incidents of civilians being killed or injured in recent airstrikes and again remind all forces of their responsibility to protect civilians in accordance with key norms and principles, such as proportionality, distinction and precautions that are enshrined in international humanitarian law.

56. Notwithstanding efforts to scale up the delivery of life-saving humanitarian assistance, especially for the 4.5 million people in hard-to-reach areas, access continues to be deliberately hindered by parties to the conflict. Administrative obstacles, such as low approval rates for inter-agency convoys and the deliberate removal of surgical items from convoys, are slowing down and preventing efforts to deliver essential humanitarian supplies and services. It is unacceptable that tens of thousands of people subsist on grass and weeds in besieged areas, while warring parties prevent access to food and essential medicines. I repeat my call to the parties to the conflict, especially the Syrian Arab Republic, to honour their obligations under international humanitarian law and to grant immediate and unimpeded access for humanitarian agencies to provide the much-needed supplies and services.

57. I remain deeply concerned by the continued attacks against health-care facilities, transport and personnel and the denial of health care to the wounded and sick. Nearly two thirds of hospitals in the Syrian Arab Republic have been destroyed or are only partly functional, and hundreds of medical personnel have lost their lives during the nearly five years of fighting. Many Syrians are unable to access basic health services and to obtain the treatments they desperately need. The shortage of ambulances, specialized medical staff and much-needed medical supplies has led to an increased number of preventable deaths. The protection and provision of medical assistance and health care to the wounded and sick in all circumstances is at the heart of humanitarian action and clearly enshrined in international humanitarian law.

58. I stress again that there is no military solution to the crisis in the Syrian Arab Republic. Only a political solution that will bring together all parties to address the underlying causes of this brutal conflict can bring hope, sustainable peace and stability. The people of the Syrian Arab Republic deserve a chance for a better future. The international community cannot continue to let them down.

59. This conflict has also contributed to a deterioration of the overall security environment in the region and beyond and has placed immense pressure on countries that have generously hosted the refugees. I urge the international community to continue to work together to secure a nationwide ceasefire and launch a credible political process to fully implement the Action Group for Syria Final Communiqué of 30 June 2012 and the Vienna Statements of 30 October and 14 November 2015. My Special Envoy continues to work closely with Syrians from across the political spectrum and members of the international community to launch intra-Syrian talks in the coming period. We must act now and use this newly created momentum to bring an end to this senseless conflict.