



OFFICE OF THE DEPUTY REGIONAL HUMANITARIAN COORDINATOR FOR THE SYRIA CRISIS

Statement by Mark Cutts, Deputy Regional Humanitarian Coordinator for the Syria Crisis on attacks on civilians in Idleb

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I am horrified by the ongoing attacks on civilian areas and civilian infrastructure as the conflict in northwest Syria continues. Yesterday, there was yet another attack on a civilian hospital. This time it was a surgical hospital in Kafr Nobol in Idleb, an underground hospital built during the war by humanitarian partners, with support from the United Nations, to provide life-saving medical support to civilians in a war zone.

This latest attack, which took place on the afternoon of 4 July, was confirmed to the United Nations by the humanitarian team that manages the hospital. There were medical workers and patients in the underground hospital at the time of the attack. Fortunately, no-one was killed or injured in the incident, which occurred at the entrance to the hospital where no-one was present at the time. Nevertheless, this latest attack once again demonstrates the cruelty of this war and the vulnerability of civilians.

Shockingly, this is the second time in two months that this hospital has been hit by airstrikes. The previous attack was on 5 May. In both instances, some of the hospital infrastructure was damaged. Moreover, the attacks happened despite the fact that the coordinates of this hospital had previously been shared with the parties to the conflict in a deliberate, carefully planned effort to prevent any attacks on it.

This follows a spate of attacks on hospitals, schools and other civilian infrastructure as the war in northwest Syria rages on. The United Nations has recorded 29 incidents involving attacks on 25 health facilities, transport and personnel, as well as 45 attacks on schools since the end of April. Two weeks ago, three of our humanitarian colleagues were killed in Maarat An-Numan when the ambulance they were travelling in was hit by a direct strike. Two rescue workers who were helping to pull people out from under the rubble were killed a week ago. Such acts of violence against civilians, humanitarian workers and civilian infrastructure are deplorable and I condemn them in the strongest terms.

Shelling and air strikes, including the use of barrel bombs, in Idleb, western Aleppo and northern Hama have now become a way of life for over two months. Over 300 civilians have been killed. Thousands more have been injured. All this in the most congested governorate in all of Syria. Of the more than 3 million civilians in the area, over half have been displaced at one time or another, with 330,000 fleeing their homes since May, most of them women and children. These people are all tired of this war, traumatized and desperate.

The international community cannot allow these attacks on civilians to continue. Where is the humanity? Idleb is burning and the world cannot simply stand by and watch. Even in times of war, parties to the conflict have obligations to protect civilians, as spelt out in the Geneva Conventions which have been signed and ratified by 196 countries – one of the most strongly supported international treaties in the world. This year marks the 70th anniversary of the Geneva Conventions. Let's use this as an opportunity to focus on the minimum standards of humanity that must be respected at all times – even in times of war.