

**Statement by Panos Moutziz, Regional Humanitarian Coordinator for the Syria Crisis, on Growing Displacement****Amman, 10 April 2018**

I am deeply concerned about the continuing massive displacement of close to 700,000 Syrians since the beginning of the year due to ongoing hostilities in the country. The latest displacement comes on top of already 6.5 million internally displaced Syrians and over 5.5 million Syrian refugees in neighboring countries. Over half of the Syrian population has now been displaced and are in need of humanitarian and protection assistance.

Civilians in Syria continue to be caught up in horrific violence. Hostilities, including attacks on residential areas, civilian infrastructure, including hospitals, markets, schools have resulted in scores of civilians being killed or injured on a daily basis. This is unacceptable. Humanitarian organizations continue to call for minimum protection standards around civilian evacuations to be respected, including in relation to unconditional access to humanitarian assistance and protection of humanitarian workers. Parties to the conflict, under international humanitarian law, must respect and protect medical facilities and personnel. The level of attacks on health facilities, workers and infrastructure in the first three months of 2018 was three times the rate seen in 2017.

In the country's northwest Idlib Governorate, over 400,000 women, children and men have reportedly been displaced by recent military operations, including over 300,000 in Idleb and 137,000 from Afrin. Most of those displaced are currently being hosted in improvised and overcrowded collective accommodations, such as schools, unfinished buildings, tents, and mosques, with a lack of privacy compounding protection risks.

The crisis has also dramatically deepened for hundreds of thousands of people in Rural Damascus following a devastating offensive on Eastern Ghouta. Since mid-February 2018, the besieged enclave has witnessed a further escalation in hostilities, with reports of mounting civilian casualties, as well as widespread damage and destruction to civilian infrastructure due to air and ground-based strikes.

An additional 133,000 people are now displaced from Eastern Ghouta. Over 44,000 of these people are in severely overcrowded IDP sites in Rural Damascus, while close to 50,000 others – mostly civilians and some fighters – have been evacuated to Idleb and Aleppo where humanitarian response has already been stretched to breaking point.

I am particularly concerned about renewed and intensive violence in Douma in Eastern Ghouta in recent days, leaving dozens dead or injured. Reports include sustained airstrikes and shelling on the city, the killing of civilians, the destruction of civilian infrastructure and attacks damaging several health facilities. At the same time, there has also been reported shelling on the city of Damascus, reportedly killing and injuring a number of innocent civilians as well.

I am also deeply alarmed by horrific allegations that chemical weapons have been used against civilian populations in Douma. While the United Nations is not in a position to verify these reports, any use of chemical weapons, if confirmed, is abhorrent, and require a thorough investigation.

At the same time, violence is also continuing in the northeast and south of the country, as well as in southern Damascus and northern rural Homs.

It is critical that civilians be protected and I echo the U.N. Secretary-General in calling on all parties to the conflict to ensure respect for international humanitarian and human rights law, including humanitarian access across Syria to all people in need, as per relevant Security Council resolutions.

With civilians continuing to be caught up in appalling violence across Syria, their protection must remain at the centre of our efforts.