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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 nineteenth 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 me 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 the United Nations agencies on the ground, from the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic and from open sources. Data from United Nations agencies and partners on their humanitarian deliveries have been reported for the period from 1 June to 31 August 2015, when available. More recent data have also been included upon availability.

II. Major developments

A. Political/military

3. Widespread conflict and high levels of violence continued throughout the Syrian Arab Republic in August. Indiscriminate aerial bombings, including the use of barrel bombs, by Government forces and indiscriminate shelling by non-State armed groups, extremist and listed terrorist groups¹ resulted in the death, injury and displacement of civilians. The conduct of hostilities by all parties continued to be characterized by widespread disregard for the rules of international humanitarian law and their obligation to protect civilians.

4. In Rif Dimashq governorate, violence continued during the reporting period. Pro-Government forces, backed by Hizbullah, continued their offensive on the strategic city of Zabadani in the Qalamun area. The situation for the civilians who are still in Zabadani remained critical. In late July, more than 4,000 people originally from Zabadani were reportedly displaced to the town of Madaya from Buqayn. Similarly, approximately 2,000 people originally from Zabadani have

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.



reportedly been forcibly relocated since 17 August from the towns of Bludan, Insha'at, Maamoura, Dimas and Rawda Batroneh to Madaya. In addition to Zabadani, Government forces intensified bombardment and shelling on the adjacent towns of Madaya and Buqayn, causing casualties among civilians, including women and children, and exacerbating the already dire humanitarian situation in the area.

5. On 1 August, Government forces dropped barrel bombs that hit a residential building in Madaya village and reportedly killed seven civilians, five from one family, including two women and two children, and injuring at least 10 other civilians. All 17 were residents displaced from Zabadani owing to the heavy bombardment by Government forces. On 26 August, Government forces dropped barrel bombs again on Madaya, reportedly killing a displaced family of five and wounding six other civilians as well as causing substantial damage to houses. According to information received by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), 46 civilians, including three women and three children, were killed because of Governmental military action in Zabadani and its surrounding areas between 2 July and 20 August.

6. Following an announcement by the Minister of National Reconciliation Affairs on the reported improvements in the security situation in Hseiniyeh in Rif Dimashq, some 10,000 people, including Palestine refugees, have returned after three years of displacement. Approximately 300 families are reportedly returning every day, with urgent needs relating to repair of shelters and rehabilitation of utilities, including water, sewage and electricity networks. The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) aims to resume services, as soon as feasible, to Hseiniyeh, which had been home to nearly 30,000 Palestine refugees and Syrians.

7. All UNRWA operations in Yarmouk remained suspended during the reporting period. The most recent UNRWA mission inside Yarmouk was conducted on 28 March. On 11 August, Syrian authorities allowed access to UNRWA to provide health care to civilians in Yalda, Babila and Bayt Saham. Between 18 and 31 August, the Agency conducted four missions to Yalda to provide medical services and water purification tablets. UNRWA medical teams treated 54 suspected cases of typhoid out of 1,103 patients during that time frame. Other humanitarian organizations have reportedly been allowed to continue their operations and deliver assistance in Yalda, Babila and Bayt Saham. The local agreement reached in those three areas is holding and the authorities have authorized a limited range of commercial goods to enter the area on a daily basis.

8. During the reporting period, non-State armed groups continued their military offensive on Government positions in Harasta and Darayya in Rif Dimashq. At the same time, Government bombardment of areas controlled by non-State armed groups increased considerably. On 2 August, Government forces carried out an attack with heavy artillery on the town of Darayya in western Ghutah, reportedly killing three civilians from one family and wounding five others. The attack was part of the Government's ongoing military operations in Darayya. On 4 August, according to sources on the ground, Government helicopters dropped four barrel bombs on Darayya and fired surface-to-surface missiles, resulting in massive destruction of civilian infrastructure. Two days later, Government forces hit Darayya again with barrel bombs and missiles fired from helicopters and jets. Three children were reportedly killed and an unidentified number of civilians injured.

9. During the reporting period, several air raids took place in eastern Ghutah. On 12 August, Government forces carried out four air raids with missiles on the town of Duma in eastern Ghutah. The attacks hit the “Sheep Square”, a popular local market and a residential area in the al-Masaken neighbourhood. As a result, at least 30 civilians were killed and approximately 150 others wounded. Four days later, on 16 August, at least 111 persons were killed and more than 200 wounded, according to local sources, by Government air raids on a local market in Duma city. My Special Envoy for Syria and the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator both expressed their condemnation of the Duma market bombardment in their press statements, calling the attack unacceptable. According to OHCHR sources, between 17 and 26 August, Government forces repeatedly hit residential areas of Duma, killing at least 90 civilians, including four women and nine children, and wounding at least 289 others. Other areas of eastern Ghutah were also heavily affected by the fighting. According to local sources, Government forces repeatedly attacked Erbin in eastern Ghutah during August. For example, on 12 August, jets fired missiles that hit a residential area in the town, killing a woman and nine other civilians. From 16 to 18 August, the town was again hit, with 15 civilians killed and more than 10 wounded.

10. On 12 and 13 August, non-State armed groups attacked Government-held areas in Damascus and Rif Damashq with mortar shelling, resulting reportedly in the death of 25 civilians. Furthermore, on 23 and 24 August, non-State armed groups launched more than 170 shells on targets in Damascus and Rif Dimashq, including Adra Prison, killing at least 10 civilians and injuring more than 30 others. The following day, non-State armed groups carried out indiscriminate attacks on Damascus city using mortar shells and rockets and affecting the residential neighbourhoods of al-Qassa’a, Bab Touma, Brumana, al-Salihiya, Baghdad Street and the areas around al-Amawiyeen Square. At least 10 civilians were reportedly killed in the attacks.

11. In northern Aleppo governorate, the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) intensified its offensive against non-State armed groups and seized several villages around Mare’a city. According to sources on the ground, ISIL attacked the city on 21 August with artillery shells that allegedly contained a chemical agent. Medical sources on the ground reported having treated four persons for symptoms that supported the testimony of the victims of having been exposed to a chemical agent. Non-State armed groups continued their attempts to repel the ISIL offensive on Mare’a, making slight advances. Furthermore, in Aleppo city, at least 31 civilians were reportedly killed in August as a result of attacks by Government forces, and at least 35 civilians were killed in attacks by non-State armed groups.

12. In Idlib governorate, Government forces intensified aerial attacks on areas under the control of non-State armed groups, including the Zayzoun thermal power station, reportedly rendering it non-operational. According to reports, on 3 August, a Government military plane crashed in the town of Ariha, in Idlib governorate, killing at least 16 people. On the same day, Government forces hit a residential neighbourhood in the town, killing at least 12 civilians. According to local sources, since 23 August hundreds of mortars have fallen into the two largely Shia majority villages of Foah and Kefraya, in response to the offensive by Government forces and Hizbullah on Zabadani, killing some 20 people. On 12 and 27 August, agreements were reached between the Government and non-State armed groups on 48-hour ceasefires in Zabadani in Rif Dimashq and in Foah and Kefraya, in Idlib

governorate. The second ceasefire broke down before the 48-hour mark and military operations resumed in both areas in early September.

13. In Dayr al-Zawr governorate, Government forces carried out several air strikes on 8 August on the town of Mohasan, reportedly targeting ISIL locations. As a result of the attack, a woman and a child were reportedly killed. ISIL continued to fire mortar shells on areas under Government control in the city of Dayr al-Zawr, killing civilians. For example, on 17 August, a man and a woman were killed during one such attack in the al-Jura neighbourhood.

14. From 12 to 20 August, 9,600 people were reportedly displaced from the besieged areas in Dayr al-Zawr city to Raqqah city and surrounding villages. In addition, an estimated 6,800 individuals have returned from Turkey to their homes in Suluk in rural Raqqah governorate. The returnees were reportedly given permission from the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) to return. Similarly, reports indicate that ISIL has allowed some of the Kurdish families that were recently displaced to Palmyra to return to Raqqah. So far, an estimated 11,000 people have returned to Raqqah city.

15. As a result of the escalation of fighting in Al Ghab in Hama governorate, 8,400 individuals have reportedly been displaced to the Salanfa subdistrict in Ladhqiyyah. In addition, a total of 24,600 individuals have been displaced within Hama governorate.

16. In Hasakah governorate, fighting between ISIL, Kurdish militias and Government forces resulted in the retreat of ISIL units from the southern neighbourhoods of Hasakah city. On 19 August, ISIL reportedly detonated a vehicle-borne improvised explosive device at the Asayish Building (Kurdish Security Organization) located in the al-Sina'a area in the al-Antariya neighbourhood in al-Qamishli. As a result of the attack, 13 civilians were killed and several others injured. On 20 August, fighting between YPG and ISIL reportedly led to the displacement of an estimated 1,500 people from the town of al-Bahra al-Khatwyneh towards several locations in Hasakah governorate. According to local sources, as at 30 August, the total number of returnees to Hasakah city reached 108,000 people, which represents 90 per cent of the 120,000 originally displaced people following the ISIL advances on the city in late June 2015.

17. On 5 August, in the eastern countryside of Homs, ISIL launched an attack on the cities of Qaryatayn and Hawarine. As a result of the ISIL attacks and the subsequent intensification of aerial bombardments, some 27,000 people have reportedly been displaced from Qaryatayn. Following the ISIL advances on Qaryatayn, Government forces reportedly carried out several aerial attacks on the city, including with barrel bombs and heavy artillery, killing and injuring civilians and causing substantial destruction to civilian infrastructure. Since then, nine non-State armed groups have reportedly merged and launched an offensive against Government forces positioned in the vicinity of the towns of al-Rastan and Talbiseh, successfully taking control of a number of Government positions at the entrance of the village of Tasneen. Government forces reportedly retaliated by attacking several areas, including al-Rastan and the villages of Ghornata and al-Ganto situated in the northern part of rural Homs, resulting in the death and injury of civilians. On 29 August, according to reports received by OHCHR, seven people were killed and at least 33 injured when Government forces fired a missile said to allegedly contain a chemical agent at the al-Amlas checkpoint, near al-Rastan. OHCHR sources also

reported that eight medical personnel who sought to treat the victims were also harmed by inhalation.

18. In Dar'a governorate, non-State armed groups continued their offensive to gain control of Dar'a city. Since the beginning of the offensive, a number of indiscriminate attacks have taken place by both sides. According to reports on the ground, on 14 and 15 August, 18 civilians were killed and 87 injured by the indiscriminate attacks by non-State armed groups in Dar'a city. Government forces also continued their aerial attacks in Dar'a, causing civilian deaths and injuries. The attacks targeted a number of towns and villages including Um Elmayathen Izra', al-Sura, Bisir El Harir, Al-Naseeb, Yadudeh and Sheikh Miskine. Sources indicate that at least 400 civilians, including women and children, have been killed by Government forces since the start of the offensive by non-State armed groups. Between 8 and 11 August, at least seven civilians were reportedly killed as a result of barrel bombs dropped by Government helicopters on the Dar'a camp, Zimrin and the town of al-Hara. For example, on 10 August, Government jets reportedly launched an attack on the village of Mzireb, killing three women and wounding an unknown number of civilians.

19. On 2 September, a vehicle-borne improvised explosive device reportedly detonated in Al-Hamam square in Ladhqiya city, killing 10 people and injuring 53 others in the first such incident in the city.

20. Civilian infrastructure continued to be affected during the reporting period. In Aleppo governorate, water cuts affected Aleppo city during the first half of August and at the end of the month, affecting up to 2 million people. The residents of Damascus were also faced with water cuts from 14 to 17 August after non-State armed groups cut off the Wadi Barada supply. On 12 August, electricity and water supplies were reportedly restored to 300,000 people in Dar'a city and the surrounding villages following cuts by non-State armed groups as of 14 and 26 July, respectively. In Idlib, reports were received on strikes by Government forces in and around nine hospitals located across the governorate, including three hospitals supported by a non-governmental organization, from 7 to 10 August, reportedly killing 11 civilians, including three hospital staff and a patient. At least 31 people were wounded in the attacks, including seven hospital staff and one patient.

21. In August, several remaining cultural heritage sites were affected by the conflict. On Tuesday, 25 August, ISIL released images purportedly showing the destruction of the ancient temple of Baal Shamin in Tadmur (Palmyra). On 18 August, according to media reports, ISIL beheaded the former chief archaeologist of Tadmur (Palmyra). I issued a press statement on 24 August condemning these barbaric acts of terror and reiterated that the perpetrators must be prosecuted. On 20 August, ISIL reportedly destroyed the Catholic monastery of Mar Elian in Qaryatayn in Homs governorate.

22. During the reporting period, negotiations continued over several local agreements between the Government and non-State armed groups. In Mu'addamiyah, a verbal agreement was reached on 18 August over the opening of the main road. In the Barzah district of Damascus, non-State armed groups blocked the road leading to Tishreen hospital, violating the local agreement in place, in response to the killing of a civilian and arresting another one at a Government checkpoint on 23 August. In Homs city, negotiations to finalize the Wa'r agreement continued between Government and local representatives. On 25 August, the Office of the

Special Envoy for Syria was informed by the parties that the agreement was near conclusion, pending agreement on the destination of fighters wanting to leave the district.

23. From 15 to 17 August, the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator visited the Syrian Arab Republic for consultations with senior Government representatives and the humanitarian community in the country. The Under-Secretary-General's discussions focused on the overall strengthening of the humanitarian response across the country and the deteriorating situation on the ground. Furthermore, from 17 to 22 August, the Deputy Special Envoy for Syria visited the Syrian Arab Republic and Turkey for meetings with relevant Government officials and representatives of opposition groups to discuss the establishment of thematic working groups in accordance with the Security Council presidential statement of 17 August 2015 ([S/PRST/2015/15](#)).

B. Human rights

24. During the reporting period, OHCHR continued to receive allegations and to document cases of arbitrary arrest and detention, torture and other ill-treatment, as well as death in custody inside Government detention centres. On 14 August, in Hama Central Prison, prison guards reportedly rounded up at least 50 detainees and beat them in their common cell before forcing them into a number of small cells used for solitary confinement. In response, hundreds of detainees inside the prison protested and took two guards hostage. Security forces surrounded the enclosed section of the prison where detainees were protesting and fired tear gas canisters at them. The standoff ended when the Hama Police Chief arrived and negotiated between the detainees and the security forces. The hostages were released and the 50 detainees released from solitary confinement cells.

25. In the town of Tal Shihab in Dar'a governorate, on 25 August, a family reported that its son, who had been detained for more than two years, had died in a Government detention centre, reportedly as a result of torture. Another family from Dar'a whose son had also been detained for a long period reported that he had died as a result of torture in the "Palestine Branch" detention centre.

26. Following the release on bail of three human rights defenders, Husein Gharir, Hani al-Zitani and Mazen Darwish, in July and August 2015, all charges against them were dropped by the Counter-Terrorism Court on 31 August. According to lawyers interviewed by OHCHR, tens of thousands of civilians have been referred to the Counter-Terrorism Court since 2012. As of July 2015, some 670 decisions have been issued by the Court.

27. According to local sources, on 20 August ISIL killed three men in rural Hama, reportedly for their alleged homosexual orientation.

28. In Idlib, the Nusra Front executed at least five men and two women on 1 and 2 August in Idlib city with gunshots to the head in front of a crowd. The killings followed a summary trial on charges of theft or being informants. According to sources on the ground, two days later, a man was killed by the Nusra Front for reportedly cooperating with the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic following a summary trial. On 15 August, sources reported that elements linked to the Nusra

Front took control of at least 60 houses belonging to displaced members of the Druze community in Jabal al-Somaq.

29. In Raqqah governorate on 4 August, approximately 10 members of YPG raided the village of Seheirijat al-Nayef, close to Tell Abyad. During the raid they arrested a 60-year-old civilian for unknown reasons. Reportedly, the civilian has been kept in al-Bawaba al-Hududiya Prison.

30. Following ISIL advances on the town of Qaryatayn in early August, at least 7,000 of the city's 50,000 residents, both Muslim and Christian, have been trapped in the city. Included among them are 47 women, 19 children and over 100 Assyrian Christians whose whereabouts remain unknown.

C. Humanitarian response

31. United Nations humanitarian agencies and partners continued to reach millions of people in need between 1 June and 31 August 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 4 million people per month. The World Health Organization (WHO) distributed medicines and supplies for nearly 2 million people per month on average. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) reached over 260,000 people per month on average with core relief items, as well as protection services. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) distributed agricultural supplies in support of over 6,400 people per month on average. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) reached on average over 61,000 people per month with multisector assistance. UNRWA continued to provide support to up to 243,985 Palestine refugees on a monthly basis. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) reached 2.5 million people per month in June and July with water, sanitation, hygiene, health, education and protection support. The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) assisted its partners to deliver 755,187 reproductive health and gender-based services to people affected by the crisis in 12 governorates. The Government of the Syrian Arab Republic continued to provide basic services to areas under its control and, in many cases, in areas beyond its control.

32. Cross-border deliveries continued during the reporting period. As at 31 August, the United Nations and its implementing partners had sent 174 shipments — 116 from Turkey and 58 from Jordan — to the Syrian Arab Republic under the terms of resolutions 2165 (2014) and 2191 (2014). These included the food assistance equivalent for nearly 2 million people; non-food items for 1.5 million people; water and sanitation supplies for nearly 1 million people; and medical supplies for some 2.4 million treatments in Aleppo, Dar'a, Hama, Idlib, Ladhikiyah and Qunaytirah governorates. Many of the medical supplies are reusable and will benefit more patients in the next few months. 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 content, destination and number of beneficiaries.

33. The United Nations Monitoring Mechanism continued its operations in Jordan and Turkey. During the reporting period, it monitored 49 United Nations humanitarian shipments, confirming the humanitarian nature of each and notifying

the Syrian authorities after each shipment had crossed the border. The Mechanism continued to benefit from excellent cooperation with the Governments of Jordan and Turkey.

34. During the reporting period, four joint inter-agency convoys, one of which was only partially completed, delivered assistance to over 200,000 people in June as detailed in the seventeenth report of the Secretary-General (S/2015/561, para. 32). No inter-agency convoys were completed in July and August.

35. Both international and Syrian non-governmental organizations continued to deliver multisector assistance in the Syrian Arab Republic, including the provision of ongoing services. During June and July, non-governmental organizations reached around 1.3 million people on average, including assistance to over 650,000 people in Aleppo governorate, over 190,000 people in Dar'a governorate and over 230,000 people in Idlib governorate.

Humanitarian access

36. The delivery of humanitarian assistance to many of the 12.2 million people in need of assistance in the Syrian Arab Republic remained extremely challenging in many areas owing to active conflict, insecurity, shifting front lines, and deliberate obstructions and interference by the parties, including restrictions on movements and burdensome administrative procedures.

37. Access to the 4.6 million people living in hard-to-reach areas remains of critical concern and is very limited compared with the level of need. Between 1 June and 31 August 2015, the United Nations agencies and partners reached 30 of the 127 hard-to-reach locations on average per month (24 per cent of locations). The United Nations agencies reached 15 locations with food assistance at least once for 424,000 people; 18 locations with health support for over 202,000 medical treatments; 6 locations with water, sanitation and hygiene for over 300,000 people; and 7 locations with core relief items for over 62,000 people. Of the 127 hard-to-reach locations, 80 (63 per cent) were not reached; 20 (15.7 per cent) were reached once during the past three months; 11 (8.6 per cent) have been reached twice; and 16 (13 per cent) have been reached three times. There has been no tangible improvement in the number of hard-to-reach locations accessed between June and August, compared with the two previous quarters.

38. Continued conflict in several governorates hindered the effective delivery of humanitarian assistance, as well as people's access to essential services. Conflict and insecurity prevented the delivery of life-saving food assistance to over 1.2 million people in parts of Rif Dimashq, rural Homs and rural Hama governorates. WFP remains unable to reach some 60,000 civilians in Ariha and Jisr al-Shughur in Idlib governorate because of sustained levels of fighting.

39. Deliberate interference and restrictions also continued to prevent aid delivery. WFP was unable to conduct deliveries to 600,000 people in Dayr al-Zawr and ISIL-controlled areas of Raqqah (with the exception of Tell Abyad), where access has been impossible since May and November 2014, respectively. Owing to safety concerns, since September 2014, WFP has suspended its plans to deliver assistance to 175,000 people in ISIL-controlled areas of rural Aleppo, including Al Bab, Mamej, Jarablus and Deir Hafer.

40. United Nations agencies continued to use the Nusaybin/Qamishly crossing with the consent of the Governments of Turkey and the Syrian Arab Republic during the reporting period. WFP completed the transportation of food rations sufficient for 251,170 people in June, and 240,000 people in August. UNHCR delivered non-food items for 25,000 people through the crossing in August. UNICEF completed airlifting 50 tons of medical, nutrition, water and hygiene supplies to Qamishli to cover the needs of 80,000 people in June, including the displaced families from Hasakah city. WFP could not transport any food assistance in July as a result of delays in receiving approvals from the Syrian authorities, as well as the temporary closure of the crossing from 28 July to 4 August owing to the difficulties related to the increased insecurity in the north-eastern Syrian Arab Republic.

41. As at 31 August, out of 81 total inter-agency requests, 20 requests have been approved in principle by the Syrian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 45 requests are awaiting approval and 3 requests have been put on hold by the United Nations because of insecurity. The remaining 13 requests are those that were previously submitted but then overtaken by newer requests. Nine of the original requests were held by the United Nations for reasons of insecurity and four were not answered by the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic within a three-month time period. Out of the 20 requests approved in principle, 9 have been completed and 1 has been partially completed. The second part of the convoy to Bludan has been unable to go ahead owing to lack of security approval. Of the remaining 10 requests approved in principle, 2 (Arbin and Zamalka) have been held up because of a lack of agreement between the United Nations, the Syrian Arab Red Crescent and the Government, as the access route approved by the latter was considered unsafe by the United Nations. Planned convoys to Nubul and Zahra' and Afrin in Aleppo, and to Foah and Kefrayah in Idlib, are stalled by the lack of approval by non-State armed groups for safe passage. The Dayr al-Zawr airlift remains pending the improvements in the security situation at the Dyar al-Zawr airport to enable the carrier to move ahead with the shipment. The convoys approved in principle by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to Mu'addamiyah, Rif Dimashq and Harbnasfah in Hama have been unable to go owing to the lack of approval from the Syrian Government security forces. The convoy to Hula in Hama governorate was deployed on 1 September but was unable to proceed to its destination because of demonstrations along the route. The convoy will be rescheduled as soon as possible. The remaining two requests approved in principle are at various stages of preparation. On 13 August, the United Nations renewed its request to deliver humanitarian assistance to Zabadani (Rif Dimashq) and Foah and Kefrayah (Idlib) in view of the ceasefire negotiations. While the Government did not approve the request for Zabadani, an approval was received for deliveries to Foah and Kefrayah.

42. No major changes in the administrative procedures required by the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic were reported over the last three months, although reports from UNICEF indicate that there have been improvements on the reduction of the time needed to obtain approvals to import humanitarian supplies. The current administrative procedures continued to delay or limit the delivery of assistance by United Nations agencies and their partners.

43. As at 30 August, 21 United Nations visa requests (either new visas or renewals) remained pending. As at 9 September, 9 of the requests are within the 15 working days' limit, 10 have exceeded the limit and 2 have been approved. In August, the Syrian Arab Republic approved 109 visa requests, of which 51 are new

and 58 renewals. This represents a marked improvement over the month of July, during which there were 65 approved visa requests, 23 new visas and 42 renewals. One visa was rejected in August; the total number of visas rejected in 2015 is 39, exclusive of the four United Nations staff who were declared *personae non gratae* in February. This compares with 28 visa rejections in all of 2014. However, five of those rejections have been reversed and the visa requests were approved.

44. The number of national non-governmental organizations authorized to partner with United Nations organizations increased from 118 (173 branches) on 1 June to 131 (214 branches) on 27 August 2015.

Besieged areas

45. Siege remains a pervasive tactic of war in the Syrian Arab Republic. Of the 4.6 million people living in hard-to-reach areas, 422,000 remained besieged: 167,500 people were besieged by Government forces in eastern Ghutah and Darayya, 26,500 were besieged by non-State armed groups in Nubul and Zahra', and 228,000 were besieged by ISIL in the Government-controlled western neighbourhoods of Dayr al-Zawr city.

46. The parties to the conflict continued to heavily restrict access to besieged areas during the reporting period. Between 1 June and 31 August, the United Nations and its partners reached an average of 9 per cent of people per month in besieged areas with health assistance, compared with 2 per cent in the previous three months. No food or humanitarian relief items reached any besieged area through official routes during the reporting period, compared with 1.4 per cent in the preceding three months. The flow of commercial supplies through official routes remained largely blocked, leading to high prices for those commodities reaching besieged areas through unofficial and irregular supply lines. Freedom of movement remained heavily restricted, although certain groups, such as students, civil servants and members of reconciliation councils, were occasionally allowed to leave and return to besieged areas.

47. In eastern Ghutah, some 163,500 people remain besieged by Government forces. Some United Nations assistance reached besieged locations in eastern Ghutah during the reporting period. In June, UNFPA assisted, through a local partner, 1,365 women in Duma with reproductive health services. In July, UNICEF delivered, through the Syrian Arab Red Crescent, medicines, paediatric kits and nutrition supplements for 5,000 children to Duma, and UNFPA provided health assistance for 750 people through a local partner. Between June and August, WHO delivered, through the Syrian Arab Red Crescent, over 80,000 medical treatments, including medicines to curb the myiasis outbreak in August, 500 renal failure sessions, 20 cholera test kits and 7,500 syringes for routine immunization.

48. In Darayya, Rif Dimashq, about 4,000 people remain besieged by Government forces. No United Nations assistance reached the areas during the reporting period. People in Darayya have not been assisted by the United Nations since October 2012.

49. In Nubul and Zahra', some 26,500 people remain besieged by non-State armed groups. In July and August, WHO delivered psychotropic medicine for 5,409 treatments to Nubul through the Syrian Arab Red Crescent. Over the past couple of months, there have been consistent and credible reports that access to and from the enclave for both commercial goods and people had improved.

50. In the Government-controlled western neighbourhoods of Dayr al-Zawr city, some 228,000 people are besieged by ISIL. In June, UNICEF, through the Syrian Arab Red Crescent, assisted 1,764 children with measles and other routine vaccinations. Between June and August, WHO airlifted medicines and medical supplies sufficient for 40,289 treatments, and provided through its implementing partners medical assistance for 1,116 treatments in Dayr al-Zawr city and the town of Alboukamal.

Free passage of medical supplies, personnel and equipment

51. Access to medical supplies and equipment continued to be restricted from some areas as a result of insecurity and access constraints by parties to the conflict. The deterioration in the security situation in many parts of the country has resulted in increases in the prices of medicines and pharmaceutical supplies and a shortage of medical supplies in local markets. The availability of life-saving health services, in particular in parts of the governorates of Hasakah, Aleppo, Idlib, Hama, Dar'a and Rif Dimashq, was also hampered. No surgical items were allowed into areas controlled by non-State armed groups during the reporting period from inside the Syrian Arab Republic. WHO transported eight surgical kits via a cross-border convoy from Jordan in July. WHO requests to the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic to send medicines and medical supplies to six locations in Damascus, Rif Dimashq, Aleppo and Idlib governorates remain pending, as well as two requests to send trauma and surgical supplies to Duma in Rif Dimashq and an airlift to Hasakah.

Safety and security of staff and premises

52. Between 22 and 24 August, rocket and mortar attacks on Damascus hit houses of two UNHCR staff members. The staff and their families were unharmed.

53. In August, a WFP truck carrying 1,000 bags of rice in Aleppo was set on fire after being hit by shrapnel, destroying the truck and all commodities.

54. On 30 July, a stray bullet hit the house of a UNHCR national staff member in the Koussour neighbourhood in Damascus, breaking a window but causing no physical injuries.

55. A total of 34 United Nations staff members, 28 of whom are from UNRWA, 1 from the United Nations Development Programme, 3 from UNHCR and 2 from UNICEF, continue to be detained or missing. The total number of humanitarian workers killed in the conflict since March 2011 is 79: 17 United Nations staff members, 46 Syrian Arab Red Crescent staff members and volunteers, 8 volunteers and staff members of the Palestine Red Crescent Society and 8 staff members of international non-governmental organizations. Of the 79, 12 have been killed since 1 January 2015.

III. Observations

56. There has been no reduction in the appalling patterns of violations of international humanitarian law by all parties to the conflict, with devastating consequences for the people of the Syrian Arab Republic. I am extremely concerned about the reports that the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic continues to

conduct indiscriminate attacks on populated areas and civilians, including with barrel bombs that have destroyed entire neighbourhoods. I am also deeply concerned by the indiscriminate use of mortars and shelling of residential neighbourhoods by non-State armed groups. These attacks must stop immediately. I once again remind all the parties to the conflict that the deliberate targeting of civilians is a war crime and those responsible need to be held to account.

57. The continuous violations of human rights by all the parties to the conflict remain of the highest concern. While I welcome the recent release of the three human rights defenders, this represents just the tip of the iceberg of all the other pending cases. Activists, lawyers and human rights defenders continue to be held in custody without a due judicial process and are often held in appalling conditions. I also condemn in the strongest possible way the targeting and the brutal killing of people based on their sexual orientation by non-State armed groups and designated terrorist groups such as ISIL. Such abhorrent acts are signs of a total disregard for basic human rights and must be stopped immediately. I urge the Government and the non-State armed groups to respect the basic rights of freedom of speech and expression.

58. I remain deeply concerned about the deliberate targeting of basic infrastructure and essential services across the Syrian Arab Republic. The cutting of water supplies and electricity in large population centres, such as Aleppo and Damascus, by non-State armed groups and designated terrorist groups is simply unacceptable and must stop immediately. Water and other essential services cannot be used as weapons of war. The recent water cuts in Aleppo, during the hottest time of the year, have resulted in a substantial increase in reports of water-borne diseases, with increasingly limited options for treatment, as many health centres and hospitals have been destroyed during the conflict. Women, children and the elderly — the most vulnerable groups of the Syrian society — have borne the brunt of the actions of the different parties to the conflict.

59. With the recent escalation of violence, and the continued rise of extremism in some parts of the country, I repeat my strong calls on all in the region and beyond to stop the flow of arms and fighters to all parties in the Syrian Arab Republic. Governments with influence need to do everything in their power to stop those from outside the Syrian Arab Republic from entering the country and taking up arms, as well as to prevent terrorist groups from acquiring financial resources, weapons and other supplies, in line with relevant Security Council resolutions.

60. Humanitarian agencies in the Syrian Arab Republic continue to do their utmost to reach the millions of men, women and children in need of life-saving assistance across the country despite the many access challenges. This assistance is delivered at great personal risk, particularly by Syrian organizations and volunteers who are often the first responders in an increasingly fragmented, volatile and dangerous environment. At a time when we should be scaling up, the United Nations agencies and their partners are forced to cut back operations owing to a lack of funds. I strongly appeal to donors to urgently provide additional funding so that we can continue our response efforts.

61. The crisis in the Syrian Arab Republic is devastating the lives of the Syrian people. More and more people have had to leave their homes in a desperate search for safety, and many feel that they have no other option but to risk the perilous journey across the Mediterranean in the hope of a better future for them and their

children. I once again urge the Security Council to take urgent action to end this crisis in the face of the deepening suffering of the Syrian people. There is no military solution to this crisis. What the Syrian Arab Republic desperately needs is a political solution that addresses the underlying causes of the conflict. I call on all the Syrian parties, and concerned regional and international Member States, to support fully the earliest implementation of the United Nations initiative to establish the intra-Syrian thematic working groups to operationalize the Geneva communiqué, which was supported by the Security Council in its presidential statement of 17 August 2015. Lack of action will result in further suffering and is depriving an entire generation in the Syrian Arab Republic of its right to a peaceful and prosperous future.
