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Daily Consolidated Update on Syria (15 October 2012)

This update is limited to inputs received from the UN system by 2:00 p.m. Any information received after the cut-off time would be reported the following day.

United Nations

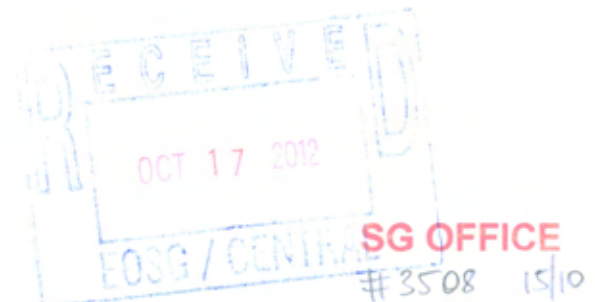
1. USG Feltman briefed the Security Council on the situation in the Middle East. He noted that the conflict in Syria had reached "new and appalling heights of brutality and violence", adding that, available estimates, which the UN is not in a position to verify, put the number of people killed at over 30,000. "Syrian cities and villages – some of which are part of our world's heritage – are turning into ruins; archaeological treasures have been looted and destroyed. Such violence is creating a fertile ground for terrorism and criminal actions of all kinds. Human rights abuses, including arbitrary detentions, torture and summary executions continue unabated," he said. USG Feltman added that, "long-standing predictions of the conflict spiralling beyond its borders are coming true, as illustrated by the recent escalation along the Syrian-Turkish border, rounds of small arms fire in the Golan, exchanges of fire into northern Lebanon, as well as a surge in belligerent rhetoric". "After all the deaths and destruction Syria has suffered, it is plain to see that this conflict cannot be won militarily – and if it were, it would be at an excruciating cost unlikely to lead to a lasting solution that respects the will of the Syrian people," he stated. He stressed that, "our priority remains a political solution."

2. Joint Special Representative (JSR) Brahimi appealed to the Iranian authorities to assist in achieving a cease-fire in Syria during the forthcoming Eid Al-Adha, an Islamic holiday, on 25-26 October. While in Iran, the JSR underlined that the crisis in Syria was getting worse every day and stressed the urgent need to stop the bloodshed. Reiterating the call of the Secretary-General for a cease-fire, he said that it would help create an environment that would allow a political process to develop. The JSR reiterated that what was needed in Syria today was real change, and that the UN's primary goal was the welfare and well-being of the Syrian people and helping them build a future that meets their legitimate aspirations. As reported in the media yesterday, the Iranian Foreign Minister handed to the JSR the proposal to resolve the Syrian conflict that Iran had tabled to the Egyptian-initiated Syria "Quartet" meeting held in New York during the General debate.

3. The JSR also held talks with Iraqi officials in Baghdad today. A statement from Iraqi Prime Minister Maliki's office said: "The prime minister warned of continuing conflict in Syria, and called for quick movement in order to maintain the lives of the Syrian brothers, and also to maintain the security and stability of the region. Iraq backs all the efforts of the UN-Arab League envoy to Syria for the sake of reaching a political solution for the worsening crisis in Syria". In a joint press conference with Foreign Minister Zebari, the JSR again denied promoting the deployment of peacekeeping operation in Syria.

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4. The UN Senior Management Group (SMG) meeting discussed the situation in Syria, among other things. Concerns were raised over refugee protection issues, including *refoulement* cases in Jordan and Iraq. The situation of the increasing number of refugees along the Turkish border, waiting to cross into camps under construction, was also of concern. As the flow of humanitarian aid from Turkey into Syria was increasing, the distinction between purely humanitarian and a political response was becoming blurrier. It was also noted that in addition to 340,000 registered and/or assisted refugees, another 300,000 (not registered) have fled Syria (bringing the total to 600,000). Another area of concern was the possibility of failure of the electricity grid inside Syria which could see many refugees crossing into Jordan with the onset of winter. The launch of a special "winter appeal" to raise funds was discussed. The importance of communication of the UN's humanitarian efforts, including in opposition-controlled areas where WFP delivered 50 percent of its aid, was highlighted. Showing the UN's work in all areas – government and opposition-controlled, would also be important for ensuring the safety of UN staff. DPI volunteered to help publicize UN efforts and requested that JSR raise the issue of visas for journalists with the Syrian Government.

5. UNDOF observed yesterday members of armed opposition groups in an olive grove approximately 100 metres east of the ceasefire line and in Jabbata al Khashab inside the area of separation (AOS) simultaneously firing small arms into Al Horaye, also inside the AOS. Government soldiers in Al Horaye returned small arms fire. Subsequently, government soldiers at positions in the area of limitation fired tank and medium mortar fire towards Jabbata and the olive grove. UNDOF observed no casualties, nor did any fire cross the ceasefire line at any time. This follows a similar incident on 25 September.

Situation on the ground

6. Opposition-held districts in Aleppo, al-Shaar and Karm al-Jabal, came under heavy bombardment from government forces today. The FSA claimed to have shot down a warplane that was shelling Aleppo. FSA fighters in Aleppo have also reportedly warned civilians to leave as they prepare a battle. Opposition activists also reported fierce clashes in the district of Jdeideh, just north of the ancient citadel in Aleppo city. Activists said more than 100 people, including 20 FSA fighters, have been killed in a battle for Khan Sheikhoun in Idlib as part of a fight for the control of Syria's main north-south road. The FSA has reportedly taken over 80 kilometers of the main road linking Aleppo and Damascus during recent battles. The FSA also took over several neighborhoods in Aleppo's Saraqeb. Fighting was reported today near the Syrian town of Jousiyeh along the border with Lebanon. On the border with Turkey's Hatay province, the FSA appeared to have a tentative hold after four days of heavy fighting in the town of Azmarin and surrounding villages.

7. President Assad has issued a decree today ordering the immediate repair of the historic Umayyad Mosque in Aleppo amid competing claims about which side was to blame for the damage sustained during fighting in and around the mosque. Parts of the 13th-century building, a UNESCO world heritage site, were set on fire.

8. A Ukrainian journalist, Ankhar Kochneva working for a Russian TV crew and reportedly sympathetic of President Assad's regime, has been kidnapped by rebels, according to a statement issued by Ukrainian President Yanukovich. The statement added that the President "ordered to

investigate all the circumstances around this incident and to protect the Ukrainian citizen's rights and interests.”

Death toll

9. Activist sources put today's preliminary death toll at 79. This number cannot be independently verified.

Humanitarian situation

10. According to UNHCR, fifty injured Syrians arrived in Jordan last week, most of them with bullet wounds and burns, as Syrian government forces continue targeting refugees. The increase in the numbers of injured Syrian refugees raises concern over the humanitarian situation along the border.

11. Human Rights Watch has issued a report titled “Iraq/Turkey: Open Borders to All Syrian Refugees”, urging the Iraqi and Turkish authorities to “re-open” their border crossings where more than 10,000 Syrians are reported to have been stranded for weeks. According to the report, Syrians have often been prevented from crossing since the second half of August 2012, with each country only allowing a limited number of people to cross either based on medical emergencies or on arbitrary limits. According to senior refugee researcher at Human Rights Watch, Gerry Simpson, Turkey was deliberately blocking refugees at the border to put more pressure on the international community to help deal with an exponential rise in the number of Syrian refugees. Simpson pointed out that although some border areas were porous, they were highly volatile and unsafe for refugees. He urged the EU to help Turkey shoulder the burden of coping with the influx of Syrian refugees.

Syrian Government

12. The Syrian army today denied using cluster munitions and said it did not possess the weapon in its arsenal, in a statement published by state news agency SANA.

Regional developments

Turkey

13. Turkish Deputy Prime Minister Bulent said an Armenian plane on its way to Aleppo was forced to land in Turkey today for security checks on its cargo. He added that Turkey had later cleared the plane to continue on its journey.

Lebanon

14. According to Lebanese media, Syrian jets flew over parts of the Bekaa region in eastern Lebanon yesterday, passing at low altitude over Aarsal.

15. Two Lebanese nationals were reportedly killed yesterday in the village of Rableh on the Syrian side of the border facing Mashree al Qaa, eastern Lebanon, during fighting in the area.

International reactions

16. An EU Foreign Affairs Council meeting was held in Luxembourg today to discuss the situation in Syria, ahead of the EU Summit. In its communiqué, the EU called on all donors to increase their contributions to the latest UN appeals and coordinate with OCHA in order to

maximize aid effectiveness. The EU also urged all parties to the conflict to respect their obligations to protect civilians and commit themselves to respect the full inviolability of all medical facilities, personnel and vehicles.

17. The EU said it would continue assisting Turkey in coping with an influx of refugees from Syria but made no offer to take them in. "Clearly we need to concentrate on the shelter of refugees there," German Foreign Minister Westerwelle said during talks among the foreign ministers in Luxembourg. "These refugees don't want to leave their country forever, they have family, they have personal ties with the country, they want to return to their country as quickly as possible," he said. Luxembourg counterpart Asselborn agreed. "We can't take planes and transport these people to Europe and say the problem is settled," he said. The ministers were responding to a call by Turkey's EU Affairs Minister Bagis to do more to help Ankara tackle the influx. "Europe should start thinking about the people who have fled Syria into Turkey," Bagis said in an interview with German daily Die Welt. "Europe has to help people who need a safe haven. It's time for Europe to finally help out," he added. EU High Representative Ashton said Brussels had been helping Turkey "for some time" and would continue.

18. The EU also introduced an assets freeze and travel ban on 28 Syrians and two firms, in the 20th round of Syria sanctions since the start of the crisis last year. The measures target people linked to violence against protestors, and firms accused of supplying equipment used for repression by the regime. The latest sanctions bring to 181 the number of people and to 54 the number of companies on an EU blacklist, many of them members of President Assad's inner circle. The new measures were accompanied by a ban on EU residents to buy, ship, insure or assist in any way Syrian companies that trade or transport arms.

19. Germany Foreign Minister Westerwelle said that despite differences over Syria, EU nations need more than ever to work with Russia in the interests of world peace. "It is precisely because of international unrest that dialogue with Russia on key issues is irreplaceable despite differences of opinion," Westerwelle said as EU foreign ministers went into informal talks with Russian counterpart Lavrov in Luxembourg. The talks were held over a three-and-a-half hour dinner. "We do not have the right to renounce the quest for joint solutions to international issues, even though it [is] very difficult at the moment with the Syrian conflict," Westerwelle's office quoted him as saying. "Russia and Europe have many common interests," he added.

20. Russia has contested evidence highlighted by Human Rights Watch that its cluster bombs are being used by the Syrian Government against opposition fighters and civilians. Foreign Minister Lavrov said: "There is no confirmation to this ... There are loads of weapons in this region, including in Syria and other countries of the region, and arms are supplied there in large quantities and illegally."

21. According to a report by the International Crisis Group, rebel groups in Syria are playing up their Islamist credentials as a ruse to secure arms from conservative Gulf-based donors.

22. Unnamed US officials and diplomats have told the New York Times that most of the arms shipped at the behest of Saudi Arabia and Qatar are going to hard-line Islamic jihadists, and not the more secular opposition groups that the West wants to bolster. "The opposition groups that

are receiving the most of the lethal aid are exactly the ones we don't want to have it," one American official said. Citing unnamed officials, the newspaper said this was the conclusion reached in classified reports presented to President Obama and other senior officials. This situation has prompted officials to voice frustration over the fact that there is no central clearinghouse for the shipments and no effective way of vetting the groups that receive them. Because of this, Central Intelligence Agency Director David Petraeus traveled secretly to Turkey last month in a bid to steer the supply effort.

DPA