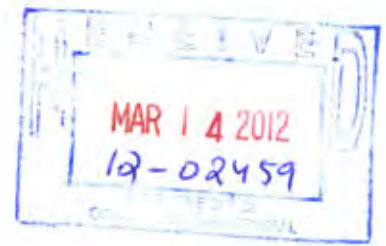
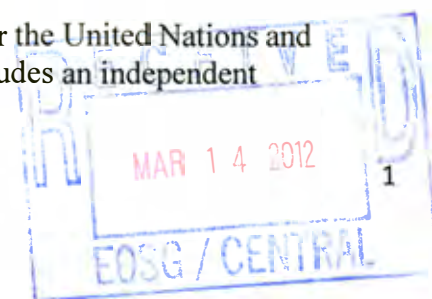


Note to the Secretary-General



VISIT TO SYRIA FROM 7 TO 8 MARCH 2012

1. After several delays from my initial request in late February, the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic (GoS) agreed for my mission to take place from 7 to 8 March. This agreement followed the Security Council statement on 29 February supporting humanitarian access, as well as significant pressure by influential Member States, namely China and Russia.
2. In Damascus, I met Foreign Minister Walid Al Mouallem and Deputy Foreign Minister Faisal Mokdad who both assured me that they were ready to cooperate with the United Nations and told me that I would be free to visit wherever I wished. In my meetings with the Minister of Health and the Minister of Education, both acknowledged that access to medical facilities and schools had been disrupted in areas affected by fighting. The ministers also acknowledged the disruption of basic services caused by electricity and fuel shortages. The GoS blamed shortages on the international sanctions, which they claimed punish the Syrian people and not the GoS. GoS interlocutors denied there are humanitarian consequences from the military activities, which they said are solely focused on defeating the opposition, which they label as “terrorists”. The GoS is preoccupied with averting what it sees as mounting pressure for regime change.
3. I visited the neighbourhood of Baba Amr in Homs, which had been heavily affected by intense fighting prior to my visit. The situation in Baba Amr was alarming. The entire neighbourhood had been devastated. It was unclear where the residents had fled, but the area was almost completely deserted. The destruction included houses that had been burned down, collapsed, or showed marks of heavy artillery shelling. Tanks had ploughed through the area, crushing cars and electrical poles and breaking the asphalt on roads. Some colleagues accompanying me described the scene as similar to the siege of Sarajevo in the mid 1990s. It was clear the Government had concluded a “clean up operation” before allowing my visit to Homs. This was unofficially corroborated by our Government escorts.
4. In Homs, I tried to visit an area controlled by opposition forces. Despite an hour and a half of negotiations, facilitated by the Syrian Arab Red Crescent (SARC), the visit could not go ahead due to gunfire in the vicinity and uncertainty regarding consent by the various armed factions in the area.
5. Together with other humanitarian partners, the United Nations is providing assistance in accessible locations and is continuing to pre-position supplies, in Syria and neighbouring countries. In 2011, I allocated US\$10 million from the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) to ensure the continuation of United Nations programmes in Syria, and will soon release another \$10 million. While in Syria I met representatives of the ICRC and the SARC, who face the same operational constraints as the United Nations. The SARC has a network of 10,000 volunteers in-country and is our main implementing partner in Syria.
6. I submitted to the GoS a proposal for unhindered access for the United Nations and humanitarian partners to conflict-affected areas. The proposal includes an independent



humanitarian assessment, the implementation of the ICRC call for a two-hour pause during periods of active fighting to allow for delivery of urgent assistance and evacuation of the wounded. My proposal also requested the issuance of visas to staff and entry of equipment.

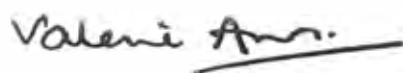
7. Prior to my departure, the GoS had not signed the agreement, however it was agreed that a preliminary humanitarian assessment would be undertaken jointly by the Government and the UN within a week of the date that a Note Verbale from the Government regarding the assessment was signed, 8 March. I have publicly qualified this outcome as "limited progress" and am aware that we will need to continue to negotiate carefully with the GoS. Nevertheless, we will seize this opportunity to collect information on the actual needs in Syria. I will continue to pursue a more comprehensive access agreement with the GoS and other armed parties, and remain committed to scaling up the delivery of assistance. The United Nations Country Team in Syria has prepared a 90-day Response Plan, which is based on our best estimates of needs. The Plan, which amounts to \$135 million, is ready to be rolled out once the GoS allows access.

8. I also visited Lebanon and Jordan from 26 to 29 February and Turkey on 9 March as part of my consultations with governments and humanitarian partners on the regional impact of the crisis in Syria. The three neighbouring countries have maintained an open border policy and are providing support to a significant number of Syrian refugees.

9. While UNHCR has officially registered 30,000 Syrians in Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey, unofficial figures indicate that many more have actually crossed the borders. Jordan alone has recorded more than 81,000 Syrians entering the country in the last year. Over the past weeks, the military operations in several towns, such as Idlib and Rastan, have caused an increased flow of refugees. More than 2,000 refugees arrived the week of 4 March in the Beka'a valley in Lebanon and an average of 250 refugees are crossing into Turkey daily. The three governments have expressed concerns that a continuation or worsening of the Syrian crisis would seriously strain their capacity to care for the refugees and may undermine regional stability.

10. I have appointed a Regional Humanitarian Coordinator to oversee contingency planning and response activities in countries affected by the Syrian crisis. A proposal to designate the Resident Coordinators in Jordan and Lebanon as Humanitarian Coordinators is under consideration, and I am increasing OCHA capacity in Syria, Lebanon and Jordan. I am coordinating closely with Joint Special Envoy Kofi Annan.

11. I expect the joint assessment to be initiated by 15 March, pending the cooperation of the GoS. I will update you on the findings of the assessment and of efforts to secure more comprehensive access to those in need. I will also brief the Security Council on 13 March, and will seek its support for securing humanitarian access.



Valerie Amos
12 March 2012

cc: Mr. Annan
Ms. Clark
Mr. Guterres
Mr. Kim
Mr. Ladsous
Mr. Lake
Ms. Malcorra
Mr. Nambiar
Mr. Pascoe
Ms. Pillay
Ms. Sheeran

Note to Mr. Nambiar
Visit to Syria from 7 to 8 March



Please find attached a note to the Secretary-General on my visit to Syria.

I would be grateful if you could kindly submit this to the Secretary-General.

Valerie Amos

Valerie Amos
13 March 2012