

Children not a 'bargaining chip' in tug of war between Syrian parties – UN advisor

7 December 2017 – The United Nations advisor for Syria said Thursday that obstacles stopping humanitarians from delivering aid and carrying out medical evacuations in besieged parts of the war-ravaged country are not being lifted, and “children are dying” as a result.

“We need help from the parties on the ground, by the Government, by all of those nations who have influence and they are not helping us as they should,” Jan Egeland, the UN Senior Advisor for Syria, told reporters in Geneva after a meeting of the Humanitarian Taskforce on the country.

The “epicentre” of the suffering, he said, is eastern Ghouta, where some 400,000 are besieged, cut off from aid and medical help.

“Six months ago a very detailed plan was delivered to the Government for needy cases of evacuation, on medical grounds. Since then, names have been added regularly and [...] we now have a revised list of 494 names,” explained Mr. Egeland.

Twelve among them have died waiting for “a half an hour drive to hospitals in Damascus and elsewhere,” he stated, noting that relief workers and aid convoys remain stalled.

“Why are we not rolling? Because of lack of facilitation letters from the Government,” he said.

Assistance to other Syrian towns and cities, including Foua and Kefraya – which are besieged by armed opposition groups – and Yarmouk, besieged by many groups, including forces loyal to the Government, also remain stalled due to disputes among the parties – on what the UN adviser referred to as – “simultaneous exchange of convoys.”

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“I would like to say that civilians, children, no one can be a bargaining chip in some kind of tug of war, where many things are negotiated at the same time. These have a right to be evacuated and we have an obligation to evacuate them,” he said, adding:

“So, I’d say, I have failed, I feel we have not been able to fix it, it is very, very heart breaking to get photos every day from children who are increasingly malnourished and who are increasingly dying and not being able

to help them.”

Government delegation to return to Geneva talks on 10 December – UN mediator

At the same press briefing, Staffan de Mistura, the UN Special Envoy for Syria announced that the Government delegation – currently on a recess – is expected to return to Geneva for the [intra-Syrian talks](#) on Sunday and that work has continued with the opposition delegation.

“We shall assess the behaviour on both sides, Government and opposition in Geneva, and based on that we will then decide how this [...] can be a building up or not, or a sabotage of [the Geneva process],” he said.

“If that is the case, we will draw our own conclusions,” added the UN negotiator, noting that any type of new initiative as an opportunity of supporting the Geneva process, building on the process and coming back to the process.

“That is the position of the [Secretary-General](#) António Guterres,” he said.