

Delays in access in Syria 'will mean further death,' warns top UN relief official

29 June 2017 – Citing attacks against aid workers in Syria, the removal of life-saving supplies from convoys and bureaucratic impediments restricting access, the United Nations Emergency Relief Coordinator has called for ensuring immediate and safe humanitarian access to save lives that are dependent on assistance.

Briefing the Security Council today, Stephen O'Brien, the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, also underlined the need for a sustained reduction in fighting to ease the burden on civilians and create an environment conducive for assistance.

"Now is the time. Any delay will mean further death. The clock is ticking," he warned.

The Syrian conflict, now into its seventh year, has taken a terrible toll on the country's population: hundreds of thousands have been killed, more than 13.5 million left [in need of humanitarian assistance](#), about 6.3 million displaced within the country, and some 5.1 million forced to flee as refugees outside its borders.

The situation is particularly dire in Raqqa, where the Syrian Democratic Forces, supported by coalition forces, launched an offensive to take the city from the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Da'esh), and in the last days fully encircled it.

According to the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights ([OHCHR](#)), at least 173 people have been reportedly killed in air and ground strikes. Although about 25,000 have reportedly fled the city since the latest phase of operations, as many as 100,000 civilians could still be trapped there, said Mr. O'Brien.

Multitude of challenges for aid workers

On relief operations in Syria, Mr. O'Brien said that the work of humanitarians remains extremely difficult and bureaucratic restrictions on top of attacks and removal of relief supplies has made their operating space incredibly complex and complicated.

Bureaucratic restrictions, he said, delay convoys and often force them to abort their missions or turn around, leaving relief workers vulnerable to attacks.

In one such incident, a driver of a truck was hit by sniper fire from unknown gunmen after his convoy had to turn back to avoid travelling at night. The

convoy had been stopped for several hours at a Government checkpoint. A bullet also grazed a second driver.

Those who deliberately direct attacks against humanitarian workers are committing war crimes Stephen O'Brien, Emergency Relief Coordinator

The injured driver survived and is in stable condition, said Mr. O'Brien.

"I condemn such acts in the strongest terms, and call for accountability for those responsible," he stressed. "Those who deliberately direct attacks against humanitarian workers are committing war crimes."