

'Sanctity of human civilian life' in Idlib must win out, urges UN Syria Envoy

With the ingredients for a "perfect storm" brewing in the Syrian province of Idlib, the international community cannot allow civilians there to succumb to such a fate, the UN Envoy for the country told the [Security Council](#) on Friday.

Speaking from Geneva, where he is based, Staffan de Mistura briefed the 15 ambassadors on the intensified military presence and increased airstrikes in the northwestern region, which have prompted fears of a potential humanitarian catastrophe in the last rebel stronghold in the country.

Idlib is one of four "de-escalation zones" in Syria agreed under a deal reached last year by Iran, Russia and Turkey in Kazakhstan's capital, Astana.

The UN estimates nearly three million people are trapped there, half of whom were displaced from other parts of the country. While most are civilians, terrorist organizations, foreign fighters and armed opposition groups have also gathered in Idlib.

"I have laid out...all the ingredients for a perfect storm. The dangers are profound that any battle for Idlib could be, would be, a horrific and bloody battle. Civilians are its potential victims, and there are ever-present dangers in the case of a full-scale assault of incidents, rapid escalations, involving regional and international players," the UN Envoy said.

"The Security Council cannot accept that the civilians of Idlib must face this type of fate. Efforts to combat terrorism do not supersede obligations under international law in the moral conscience of humanity. We must put the sanctity of human civilian life above everything else."

Mr. De Mistura urged all stakeholders in the crisis to find a solution to prevent a tragedy in Idlib while also addressing the issue of terrorism.

The three "Astana guarantors" met in Tehran on Friday and Mr. De Mistura will hold talks with them in Geneva starting on Monday.

He will also meet with representatives from Egypt, France, Germany, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, the United Kingdom and the United States later in the week.

"It would be the ultimate failure of imagination and of diplomacy if, with these efforts, we simply saw an increase of military activities," he said.

John Ging, a top official with the UN's humanitarian affairs office, [OCHA](#), updated ambassadors on ongoing efforts in Idlib, where the global organization and its partners reach around two million people each month.

Plans are in place to support up to 900,000 civilians who could be affected by conflict, while stocks of food, medical supplies and other items have been pre-positioned.

Mr. Ging reported that parties to the conflict have received “de-confliction information” related to 125 humanitarian facilities, warehouses and other sites in Idlib where residents can find assistance.

“In their military operations, all parties bear the obligation to take constant care to spare civilians, and civilian objects, including humanitarian workers and humanitarian facilities,” he said.

The OCHA Director of Operations concluded his briefing with five requests to the international community.

These “key asks” included a call for a cessation of hostilities in Idlib, for safe humanitarian access, and to allow civilians the freedom to leave the area. Mr. Ging also appealed for an increase in humanitarian funding, noting that the current response was “already overstretched”.