

Syria: As airstrikes hit Raqqa, UN sounds alarm over plight of civilians

6 June 2017 – The United Nations humanitarian wing today said it is deeply concerned for the safety and protection of more than 400,000 civilians in Syria's war-torn Raqqa Governorate, who continue to be exposed to daily fighting and airstrikes.

The humanitarian situation in Al-Raqqa governorate remains dire, with the majority of the population reportedly facing critical problems in meeting their immediate needs, Alessandra Vellucci, Director of the UN Nations Information Service in Geneva on behalf of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) told reporters at today's regular press briefing.

She also reiterated the UN's call for unconditional, unimpeded and sustained access to those affected by the fighting in Raqqa, and more broadly to the 4.5 million who are still in hard-to-reach areas across the war-torn country.

Turning to the internally displaced (IDPs), she pointed out that more than 160,000 people have been displaced since 1 May with the situation on the ground remaining fluid. There are some 87,200 in the Ar-Raqqa governorate; nearly 37,000 in Aleppo; over 33,400 in Idlib; and smaller numbers in Hama, Deir-ez-Zor and Homs.

On 3 June, three internally displaced people, including a pregnant woman, had been reportedly killed by a landmine. On 4 June, airstrikes on the al-Mashlab neighbourhood in Raqqa city had reportedly resulted in the destruction of two schools while mortar shelling in the vicinity of another school injured several people, she said.

Ms. Vellucci stated that since March, UN agencies continued to provide multi-sectoral humanitarian assistance through their local partners such as food, medical treatment and vaccinations throughout Raqqa, including IDPs in camps.

Some 60,000 Syrian refugees in Lebanon in Jordan could lose assistance

For its part, the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) sounded the alarm that humanitarian programmes supporting Syrian refugees and their host communities are quickly running out of resources.

Citing critical gaps in Lebanon and Jordan, UNHCR spokesperson Andrej Mahecic told journalists in Geneva that vital parts of its response to Syrian refugees were critically underfunded.

Despite generous pledges, humanitarian programmes in support of Syrian refugee and communities hosting them are quickly running out of resources. The situation is most dramatic in Lebanon and Jordan where a number of direct

cash assistance activities could dry up in less than four weeks,” he said.

Those who fled to Jordan face stark challenges.

“Refugees tell our staff that UNHCR monthly cash support means a meal a day, a better roof, their dignity. Now they fear losing everything. Many say would prefer to go back to Syria to die if they stop receiving this assistance,” continued Mr. Mahecic.

In Lebanon, where UNHCR urgently needs \$116 million, direct cash assistance programmes for refugees will be affected first.

“These include a lifeline of multi-purpose cash for 30,000 Syrian refugee families, a winter cash assistance for two months for another 174,000 families and protection cash assistance for 1,500 refugee households to help them overcome periods of hardship,” he continued.

“The funding gap also jeopardises 65,000 life-saving secondary health care interventions and support to UNHCR's and the Lebanese Authorities' capacity to issue and renew documentation for refugees, following a recent decision to waive the residency renewal fees which most refugees could not afford,” Mr. Mahecic added.

Mid-way through this year, the \$4.6 billion inter-agency appeal to meet the immediate humanitarian needs of Syrian refugees across the Middle East and North Africa is only 18 per cent funded.