

Syria 'bleeding inside and out' as conflict enters eighth year, says UN chief

Despite a United Nations Security Council demand to institute a 30-day ceasefire across Syria, airstrikes, shelling and ground offensives have intensified in Eastern Ghouta, Secretary-General António Guterres reported Monday, warning that the conflict is entering its eighth year with the "grimmest" reality on the ground.

A country known for its ancient civilization and with a people known for their richness of diversity, "Syria is bleeding inside and out," the UN chief told the 15-member body in his [briefing](#) on the implementation of [Security Council resolution 2401](#) unanimously adopted on 24 February.

Along with a 30-day ceasefire, the resolution calls for delivering aid, evacuating the sick and wounded, lifting sieges, accelerating humanitarian mine action, and protecting civilians and infrastructure.

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According to UN data, the conflict has produced more than 5.6 million Syrian refugees and 6.1 million internally displaced people, with more than 13 million people inside the country requiring humanitarian assistance, including nearly six million children.

"Let me highlight just one stark fact on this grimmest of anniversaries: In 2017, more children were killed in Syria than during any other year since the war began," he said.

However, violence continues in Eastern Ghouta and beyond, including in Afrin, parts of Idlib and into Damascus and its suburbs, Mr. Guterres said, warning that in Eastern Ghouta, airstrikes, shelling and ground offensives have even intensified and claimed many hundreds of civilian lives, some even saying more than 1,000 were killed.

He reported that none of the Council's directives have been implemented: the provision of humanitarian aid and services has not been safe, unimpeded or sustained; no sieges have been lifted and not one critically sick or wounded person has yet been evacuated.

All parties involved should be reminded that even efforts to combat terrorist groups identified by the Council do not supersede these humanitarian obligations.

Mr. Guterres noted, however, that in some areas, like Deir ez-Zour and Douma, the conflict is diminishing in intensity.

A ceasefire between the Government and Jaish al Islam forces in Douma is largely holding, he said, noting that their meeting took place yesterday and today, and there has been progress on civilian evacuations and humanitarian aid.

Mr. Guterres' oral report detailed latest efforts of his Special Envoy for Syria, [Staffan de Mistura](#), to bring about a political solution to the conflict and UN activities to address the humanitarian crisis.

"On Thursday, this conflict will enter its eighth year. I refuse to lose my hope to see Syria rising from the ashes," he said, "To see a united, democratic Syria able to avoid fragmentation and sectarianism with its sovereignty and territorial integrity respected and to see a Syrian people able to freely decide their future and choose their political leadership."

Click here for [full remarks](#) by Mr. Guterees.