

Syria: UN chief warns Idlib offensive may set off 'humanitarian catastrophe'

According to a statement issued by his Spokesperson, Mr. Guterres said that "any use of chemical weapons is totally unacceptable," adding that he "urgently appeals to the Government of Syria and all parties to exercise restraint and to prioritize the protection of civilians."

"He calls on the Astana guarantors to step up efforts to find a peaceful solution to the situation in Idlib, the last remaining de-escalation zone," the spokesperson stressed, referring to Russia, Turkey and Iran, which have since last year worked together on the establishment of de-escalation zones in Syria's war-ravaged areas.

The Secretary-General, in today's statement, further called on all parties "to take all necessary measures to safeguard civilian lives, allow freedom of movement, and protect civilian infrastructure, including medical and educational facilities, in accordance with international humanitarian law and human rights law."

The statement came one day after John Ging, Director of Operations with the UN Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs ([OCHA](#)), told the Security Council that intense aerial bombardment and shelling in Idlib and three other governorates in north-west Syria have left death, damage and destruction in their wake, and placed an even greater strain on aid workers and communities hosting displaced people.

According to news reports, the three million people – roughly half of whom are native residents and the other half persons displaced within the country – of Idlib, the last big rebel enclave, are bracing for Syrian Government forces to begin a phased offensive.