

Syria: UN Humanitarian Coordinator calls for unimpeded access from within the country

Highlighting the “complexities of the situation in Syria” with close to 13 million people in need of life-saving assistance, the United Nations Humanitarian Coordinator in the country called on warring parties to allow access to all areas from within the country, so aid can reach those in need “fast and efficiently”.

Ali Al Za’atari, who is also Resident Coordinator in Syria, said that was especially necessary in the north-west cities of Idlib and Afrin.

“Syria is still undergoing a serious humanitarian crisis and this humanitarian crisis affects about 13 million Syrian citizens and refugees as well,” he told the UN News Arabic service.

During a briefing to the press at UN Headquarters in New York, he noted that given the scale of the needs remaining across all sectors – food, health care, education, economic recovery and reconstruction – and the continued movements of population, the crisis is likely to continue for years.

“There are no longer armed clashes and shells falling on the roofs and on people in many cities and Syrian territories, but in other areas this threat still exists and people are still scared and insecure,” he stressed.

Noting that donors have been “generous”, he warned that the 2018 Humanitarian Response Plan was in need of nearly \$3.4 billion in total – but only 46 per cent funded so far. “This puts limits on our work in Syria,” he said, adding that he is confident more funding will be received by the end of the year.

Although 14 UN agencies are based in the country, humanitarian access for assessments and aid delivery remains challenging, especially in the cities of Idlib and Afrin as “the region is out of government control” and “it could be a very long and complicated process to get access.”

On the sidelines of the UN General Assembly in New York last week, Mr. Al Za’atari said that a plan had been agreed between UN humanitarians and the Syrian government delegation “that would allow for greater and faster access, as well as various assessments of the situation of those in need”.

“If things continue well, as agreed, we expect to have an agreed response plan by March 2019,” he told UN News.