

Syria: UNICEF cites conflict's 'staggering' impact on children; calls for urgent assistance and protection

25 August 2017 – Six and a half years of war in Syria has inflicted untold suffering on the country's children, a senior United Nations official said today, urging parties to the conflict to stop the violence and live up to their legal obligations to children.

The impact of war on children across Syria is staggering, said Fran Equiza, the UN Children's Fund's (UNICEF) Representative in Syria.

Ongoing and heavy fighting has displaced thousands of families from Raqqa city and Deir-ez-Zor.

I have just completed a visit to the camps in Areesha, Ein Issa and Mabrouka where I met with displaced children and oversaw UNICEF's lifesaving efforts on the ground, continued Ms. Equiza.

I am overwhelmed by the profoundly traumatising experiences these children have been through. They have endured brutal violence, lost friends and family members, she elaborated, adding They are terrified, yet hopeful.

The UNICEF representative relayed that an 11-year old displaced girl who fled Raqqa told her, Before we used to play, but then the darkness came.

According to reports UNICEF is receiving from inside Raqqa city, several thousand children continue to be trapped and caught in the direct line of fire.

With no access for humanitarian agencies, the city is completely cut off from lifesaving assistance.

As the conflict further intensifies, children and families have little or no safe water, while food supplies are running out fast. Moreover, trapped children increasingly risk death and injury.

Children and families who wish to leave Raqqa city must be allowed to do so in safety and in dignity, he stressed, adding: Parties to the conflict must protect them and facilitate safe passage for civilians to move to safety.

Ms. Equiza underscored that parties to the conflict must stop the violence all over Syria and live up to their legal obligations to children.

All children in Syria, regardless of their location or their families'

affiliation must be protected at all times,” she concluded.