

UN refugee agency issues renewed funding plea for Syria, as conflict enters seventh year

9 March 2017 – Unless drastic measures are taken to share up peace and security in Syria, the situation – which marks its sixth anniversary next week – will worsen, the United Nations refugee agency today said urging the international community to redouble its support for the 13.5 million people in need of aid.

Funding won't end the suffering. But it is one thing we can do as poverty and misery intensify. The resources currently available simply don't come close to meeting all the challenges, said Filippo Grandi, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees. Funding won't end the suffering. But it is one thing we can do as poverty and misery intensify..

His message comes ahead of 15 and 16 March, when in 2011 authorities clamped down on demonstrations in Damascus, setting off protests calling for the overthrow of President Bashar al-Assad.

Since then, nearly 6.3 million people were displaced and an additional 4.9 million people – mostly women and children – were forced to seek refuge, according to UN figures. Nearly 3 million Syrians under the age of five have grown up knowing nothing but conflict.

Ultimately, Syria's conflict isn't about numbers – it's about people, Grandi added. Families have been torn apart, innocent civilians killed, houses destroyed, businesses and livelihoods shattered. It's a collective failure.

One of those people is Wafaa Keyari, an eight-year-old girl from the battered Sakhour district of eastern Aleppo.

Living now in a temporary shelter on the outskirts of Aleppo, Wafaa was severely burned on her face and body when her house was shelled two years ago.

I was taken to hospital. I was awake and they treated me, Wafaa told UNHCR.

You know I was wearing wool clothes, like the ones I am wearing now, they got stuck to me. When they took me to the hospital, they were pulling them off my skin. It hurt so much, they didn't even use anaesthetic – they just pulled it off.

Asked whether the incident had changed her at all, she paused for a moment before replying with a smile: No. I am still the same nice girl.

In the shadow of the sad anniversary, the international community is

preparing for a conference in Brussels in early April to assess the country's future. The UN is seeking \$8 billion for this year to meet the needs of Syrians in the country and those living abroad.

According to UNHCR, the request follows commitments made at the 2016 London Conference, especially on education and livelihoods.

"Syria is at a crossroads," Mr. Grandi said. "Unless drastic measures are taken to shore up peace and security for Syria, the situation will worsen."