



PRESS RELEASE

Syrian Arab Red Crescent and IFRC appeal for increased access and safety of volunteers at the beginning of Syria pledging conference

Brussels, 30 June 2020 – For ten years, the people of Syria have faced a brutal and unrelenting crisis. The Covid-19 pandemic and recent harsher economic sanctions have exacerbated humanitarian needs, making the situation more untenable than ever before, for civilians with no stake to the conflict. More than 11 million Syrians, who were once self-sufficient, are reliant on humanitarian assistance. Unemployment is above 50 per cent and food prices increased by 133 per cent in one year. Internally displaced people, host families, returnees and residents struggle to meet their needs for food, water, health care and other basic services. In just seven months, the number of food insecure people in Syria has spiked from 7,9 million to 9,3 million.

“The Covid-19 pandemic is a negative catalyst of a multitude of new and complex challenges including: the restriction of movement and goods, the delay of certain field activities, the closure of borders and a critical insufficiency of protective equipment for staff and volunteers,” says IFRC President Francesco Rocca. “These are just some of the factors that are dramatically impacting our operations. This pandemic has, once again, highlighted the importance and need for more locally led response. Our volunteers and staff are already on the ground responding. They are trained and ready, independent of travel bans or lockdowns. They are part of local communities and know their needs and challenges”.

Counting around 11,000 active volunteers and staff, the Syrian Arab Red Crescent is the largest community-based provider of humanitarian services in Syria and continues to play a pivotal role in delivering vital assistance, despite huge security constraints and challenging operating environments. Since 2011, 65 staff and volunteers, in addition to eight from the Palestine Red Crescent Society working in Syria, have been killed in the line of duty, with many more injured or detained, most recently in Idlib, in the north western region.

“Our volunteers and staff provide life-saving assistance to more than 5 million people a month throughout Syria. We urgently need parties to the conflict to act in accordance with international humanitarian law and guarantee the safe and unimpeded access of our volunteers to all communities in need, in order for us to deliver neutral, independent and impartial humanitarian assistance without the fear of being targeted.”, says SARC President Eng. Khaled Hboubati.

“Despite all the obstacles and challenges, our volunteers are actively engaged across Syria, particularly in the northeastern and northwestern regions. Recent challenges posed by the emergence of COVID-19 and the unfair impact of economic sanctions on civilians, put our ability to deliver assistance at even higher risks. As we work to ensure that aid always reaches the most vulnerable people, we urgently need the support and solidarity of all donors”, concludes President Hboubati.

The Syrian Arab Red Crescent operates through 14 branches across the UN-recognized national borders of Syria, including 68 active sub-branches, in territories controlled by different

parties. More than 11 million people are in need of aid. Among them, 6 million are displaced, some for the second or third time in ten years. A more violent outbreak of Covid-19 and a flare up of the armed conflict are a constant threat, particularly for those living in camps such as Al Hol or crowded suburbs - where the displaced more than doubled the number of inhabitants - where physical distancing is an impossibility.

“Responding to the needs of a population lacking supplies essential for its survival is a legal obligation under International Humanitarian Law. Too often, humanitarian access in Syria has been used by parties to the conflict as a commodity in political transactions or negotiations”, adds IFRC’s President Francesco Rocca. “At the beginning of the IV Brussels Conference on Supporting the Future of Syria and the Region, the Syrian Arab Red Crescent and IFRC call on all parties to respect UN resolutions granting safe access and protection to humanitarian workers as well as civilians.”

The Syrian Arab Red Crescent and IFRC further call on donors to continue to respond and sustain their support both within Syria and in the region at large, focusing on neighbouring countries hosting refugees from Syria. In 2019, the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement have provided humanitarian aid to more than three million people in Lebanon, Jordan, Egypt, Iraq and Turkey. Movement partners are helping refugees, host communities and authorities in the neighbouring countries to enable them to cope with displacement and the additional burden on public services.

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