



10-year Syrian conflict

« Syria - Demining and rebuilding will take generations »

Ottawa, 9 March 2021. 10 years after the start of the conflict in Syria, the humanitarian crisis is only getting worse. Humanitarian needs are immense while access to people in need remains a major challenge. Even when the conflict ends, rebuilding Syria will take generations: the level of destruction of infrastructure, contamination by explosive devices – a level unprecedented in the history of mine clearance - and the scale of population displacement are enormous challenges to overcome. The conflict in Syria provides a clear example of the long-term humanitarian consequences of explosive weapons used in populated areas. States must support the draft international agreement against urban bombing currently being negotiated to help end the suffering.

- After 10 years of war, continuous bombing and shelling in populated areas has had appalling humanitarian consequences: thousands of deaths and life-changing injuries, psychological trauma, families torn apart, forced displacement, destruction of essential infrastructure like hospitals, schools, bridges, etc. and ever worsening poverty. HI is working in Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq and Egypt with Syrians who have lost everything and need humanitarian aid to survive.
- At least a third of homes in Syria are damaged or destroyed. Major cities like Raqqa, Aleppo and Homs have been largely destroyed by extensive and intense use of explosive weapons. 80% of the city of Raqqa was destroyed in 2017. Massive, continuous bombing and shelling has left millions of people without homes and forced them to flee.
- The level of contamination is unprecedented in the history of mine clearance: contamination from unexploded ordnance (UXO), i.e., bombs, rockets and mortars that did not explode on impact, and other explosive hazards such as landmines and booby traps, is so severe that it will take generations to make Syria safe. 11.5 million people are currently living in areas contaminated by explosive hazards.
- Contamination with explosive remnants of war is one of the significant obstacles preventing the safe return of refugees and displaced persons in Syria. It will also be a major obstacle to rebuilding Syria, its economy and social fabric. Rebuilding cities and infrastructure in Syria will require complex and expensive clearance operations.

Humanitarian needs

As violence continues across Syria, over 13 million people need humanitarian assistance – over 6 million of whom are children. Access to basic services (health, food, clean water, shelter, etc.) remains an absolute priority.

- 6.7 million people are displaced inside the country – many of whom multiples times –, which is the largest internally displaced population in the world. Nearly a quarter of people have disabilities – close to double the global average. 5.6 million Syrians are refugees in neighbouring countries and heavily rely on humanitarian aid.
- The current humanitarian crisis is aggravated by an acute economic crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic, making an already severe situation worse. Humanitarians struggle to access all communities in need and face mounting security risks: in 2020, there were 65 recorded attacks on aid workers, nearly half of those attacked were killed. It is estimated that there have been at least 100,000 COVID-19 cases in Government of Syria-controlled territory alone.
- As health infrastructure has been destroyed by bombing, health services are unable to cope with this additional health crisis. Only half of hospitals and primary healthcare centres across Syria are fully functional.

Quotes

- "Syria is a special case in terms of contamination for two reasons. The first is the wide variety of weapons used. After 10 years of conflict, the whole spectrum of explosive weapons contaminates Syrian soil: unexploded bombs, remnants of exploded bombs, improvised weapons, improvised mines, explosive booby traps... The second reason lies in the type of areas affected. Urban areas are the most affected, but we know from experience that it is particularly difficult to clear urban areas. Thousands of tonnes of rubble and explosive remnants that pollute the soil."
- "Over and over again, we see the human suffering caused by urban bombing. It must stop. In Syria but also in Iraq or in Yemen, we have witnessed disastrous consequences for civilians in cities subjected to massive bombing and shelling. HI has been engaged in decisive victories against landmines (1999) and cluster munitions (2008). We have now a historic opportunity to clearly say 'stop' to urban bombing. States must commit to the current diplomatic process for an international agreement against the use of explosive weapons in populated areas. They must recognise the indiscriminate human suffering caused by the use of explosive weapons in populated areas and the lasting effects."

About Humanity & Inclusion (HI)

HI is an independent international aid organisation. It has been working in situations of poverty and exclusion, conflict, and disaster for 38 years. Working alongside people with disabilities and other

vulnerable groups, our action and testimony are focused on responding to their essential needs, improving their living conditions, and promoting respect for their dignity and basic rights. Since it was founded in 1982, HI has set up development programmes in more than 60 countries and intervenes in numerous emergency situations. The network of eight national associations (Belgium, Canada, France, Germany, Luxembourg, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and the United States) works constantly to mobilise resources, jointly manage projects, and to increase the impact of the organisation's principles and actions. HI is one of six founding organisations of the International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL), the co-winner of the Nobel Peace Prize in 1997 and the winner of the Conrad N. Hilton Award in 2011. HI takes action and campaigns in places where "living in dignity" is no easy task.

Learn more: www.hi-canada.org

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