

# Policy Statement on Assuring Access to Medical and Humanitarian Aid in Syria

Adopted at SGA 2014, York

## Summary

The UNHCR has estimated that there are 9.3 million people in need of humanitarian assistance in Syria and 2.3 million refugees (1 million of these children) who have sought protection as a result of the Syrian civil war. (1) The UN is \$4.1 billion short of necessary funds to provide assistance to those most in need as a result of the crisis, where crimes against humanity have been committed, by both the Syrian government and opposition.

We, Medsin affirm that the conflict in Syria is disproportionately affecting civilians. The crisis has resulted in the basic needs of the civilian population going unmet, including access to food, health services and essential medicines. According to the UN, the denial of medical care as a weapon is a chilling reality of the war in Syria. The IFSMA supports the UN and international human rights law to ensure the right to health for these people.(2) There are also concerns that the humanitarian assistance is not getting through. Therefore, Medsin calls for the unblocking of humanitarian assistance to help the population that is caught up in the violence.

## Introduction

The Syrian conflict started in March 2011 with civil unrest and has now progressed to civil war.(3) The death toll stands at more than 100,000. (1) The UN Human Rights Council has accused both the Syrian government and the opposition of committing war crimes and crimes against humanity. (4) Within a few years, Syria has gone from being the world's second largest refugee-hosting country to fast becoming the largest refugee-producing country. (5) The UNHCR has estimated that there are 9.3 million women, children and men in need in Syria and 2.3 million refugees who have sought protection in neighbouring countries – a number that is expected to rise if the conflict continues unabated. (5)

## Main text

In a UN report the deliberate targeting of hospitals, medical personnel and transports, the denial of access to medical care, and ill-treatment of the sick and wounded, has been stated as one of the most alarming features of the Syrian conflict. The denial of medical care as a weapon is a chilling reality of the war in Syria.(2) This threat to the depoliticised nature of medical aid and humanitarian relief should be something that the medical profession fights to defend.

According to MSF (Medecins Sans Frontier) the five-to -seven million people living in opposition-held territories close to Syria's international borders receive no medical aid and get only minimal material assistance from Damascus. (6) MSF has stated that agencies and international organisations are subject to tight controls imposed by the Syrian government, which limits or prohibits the distribution of humanitarian aid—particularly medical aid—in opposition-controlled areas. This information underscores the urgent need for increased cross-border aid deliveries and the opening of humanitarian corridors into these opposition held areas to reach the people most in need. (6)

Of the 2.3 million Syrian refugees most have fled to Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey, Iraq and Egypt. UN High Commissioner for Refugees António Guterres has said 'the Syria crisis is having a dramatic impact on these countries economies, societies and even on their security'. (7) He has also expressed concern about serious gaps in the protection of Syrians arriving in Europe and has

urged a more generous and consistent approach to Syrians seeking shelter and asylum in Europe. (8)

At a recent UNHCR meeting, 39 countries pledged to help alleviate the suffering of the Syrian population. International donors meet in Kuwait City on January 15th and pledged more than US\$2.4 billion to help UNHCR and other aid organisations respond to the massive humanitarian needs generated by the crisis in Syria. This was short of the UN's appeal of \$6.5 billion necessary to help the Syrian population. (5)

***Medsin therefore:***

1. Calls on the UN Commission that holds the Government to account to fulfil its obligations under international human rights law to ensure the right to health, a right that is closely and inextricably linked to the rights to life, human dignity, non-discrimination, equality and the prohibition against torture and ill-treatment, is upheld. (2)
2. Supports the MSF statement that if the government of Syria remains the sole distribution channel for international humanitarian relief efforts, then millions of Syrians will continue to be deprived of adequate assistance, particularly essential medical services. (9)
3. Supports the open letter from MSF that states the urgent need to significantly increase cross-border assistance, and to prioritise this issue in negotiations on humanitarian aid.
4. Acknowledges the USD\$2.4 billion given in aid to the Syrian conflict but calls for countries to meet the UN's requested \$6.5 billion.
5. Recognises these funds are vital to providing life-saving food supplies, water, shelter, essential medicines, health services, and supporting livelihoods. (5)
6. Endorses the UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's comment that donations of aid are "also sending a strong signal to the neighbouring countries – that we appreciate their generosity, and that they will not be left to shoulder the burden alone."(5)
7. Supports the UNHCR in making every effort to remind the European community and other countries of the need to show solidarity and responsibility in supporting Syrian refugees with countries at the external borders of Syria. (EU). (10)
8. Supports the statement by UN High Commissioner for Refugees, António Guterres, that the international humanitarian response remains of live-saving importance. Massive international solidarity is crucial, not only to support suffering Syrians, but also for the countries that have so generously taken in refugees. (7)

**References**

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