



### Food Insecurity in Syria Reaches Disturbingly High Levels

More Syrians require humanitarian assistance now than at any other time since the start of the ongoing conflict in the country back in 2011, according to officials at the United Nations. Recent analysis suggests that in the coming year, an estimated 14.6 million Syrians will be dependent upon aid, with 12 million considered food insecure. Rapidly increasing food prices, the decreased value of currency, and a faltering economy are the leading factors behind the crisis. There are also over 6 million people, including at least 2.5 million children, that have been internally displaced within Syria – the largest such number of citizens in the world. The brutal violence resulting from the long-standing conflict has devastated the country, as continued shelling, armed skirmishes, and drone strikes have all contributed to the humanitarian suffering. The damage to essential infrastructure has further exacerbated the crisis, with many Syrians being cut off from basic services.

The food insecurity situation was a major talking point of U.N. officials. Extreme water shortages in northern Syria have created drought-like conditions compounding the issues caused by the conflict. The looming threat of the possibility that the government could launch an offensive this year to take back territory outside of its control is also worrying. This offensive could put an additional 3 million people at risk. Another troubling factor is the expiration of United Nations-authorized border crossing operations to bring in aid from countries neighboring Syria. This is set to expire in July of this year, and would make it nearly impossible for humanitarian actors to supply large-scale aid efforts to address new crises that are sure to arise in 2022. There are other barriers to providing assistance to Syrian civilians given that the country remains the deadliest place for humanitarian workers. The United Nations' goal in 2022 will be to increase the resilience of the population to natural and man-made disasters, as well as continue to offer access to basic services. This will particularly apply to Syria in hopes of getting a segment of people to a point where they do not need to rely on food aid.

The negative state of the Syrian economy has caused many families to pull their children from school, as they spend an average of 50% more than they make – going into debt and worsening their humanitarian circumstances. Mines and other ordnance restrict freedom of movement in Syria and thus also play a role in hindering the civilian population. According to Geir Pedersen, the United Nations Special Envoy for Syria, a political solution is the only way out of the existing humanitarian crisis. He has urged the international community to continue to build trust and confidence with the Syrian people, and emphasized that a government which reflects the will of its citizenry is a critical element and needs to be supported. Pedersen has also encouraged engagement with all parties involved in the Syrian conflict, including Turkey, Russia, the United States, and Jordan.

Syria currently ranks among the top 10 most food-insecure countries globally and is in desperate need of help. The stalemate has caused acute suffering. There is potential for a resolution, as a 45-member committee representing the Syrian government, the opposition, and civil society are set to resume talks in Geneva on March 21st. The aim is to draft constitutional reforms, and there have also been preceding agreements to meet again in May and June as well.