



From UNICEF's Regional Director for the Middle East and North Africa Ted Chaiban, WHO's Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean Dr Ahmed Al-Mandhari, and Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance's Director of Country Support Pascal Bijleveld

AMMAN/CAIRO/GENEVA, 22 April 2021 – “Syria received 256 800 doses of the COVID-19 vaccine, the first COVAX delivery of vaccines to reach the war-torn country. This delivery of AstraZeneca vaccines (from the Serum Institute of India) will be given to frontline health workers across Syria, including in the northeast and northwest.

“The delivery is a ray of light for the people of Syria. It will help health workers to continue delivering life-saving services in an already exhausted health system as a result of the decade-long war.

“The COVID-19 vaccines were delivered today through 2 shipments: 203 000 doses arrived in Damascus while another 53 800 doses were delivered to the northwest, an area that continues to witness armed conflict and displacement. More deliveries are planned for Syria in the coming weeks and months.

“To date, Syria has recorded 51 580 cases of COVID-19. The actual number is likely to be much higher due to limited or unavailability of testing supplies. This makes the delivery of vaccines critical and timely. Much more support is needed to help Syria’s health workers wherever they are in the country and its most at-risk population including the elderly and those with underlying health conditions to get the vaccines against this virus.

“Vaccines are a critical preventive measure. They are however far from enough. Getting the vaccines does not guarantee full protection. This is why it is absolutely critical that we all continue to wash hands, wear masks and maintain social spacing to increase protection from the virus.

“While we will continue to work to deliver more vaccines across the region including to war-torn countries like Yemen and Syria, we call for vaccine equity. Wealthier countries should consider sharing extra doses with the COVAX Facility, so we are able to reach more people, quicker and together. Let’s turn words into action. Now is the time for true solidarity and for sharing the collective burden of this pandemic.

“Since 3 March, the COVAX Facility has delivered more than 5 million doses to the Middle East and North Africa. In addition to today’s delivery to Syria, the facility reached 18 countries in total including Islamic Republic of Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, Palestine, Sudan and Yemen among other conflict-affected and fragile countries”.

“When we say, ‘we are not safe until everyone is safe’, we mean every word. UNICEF, WHO and Gavi are committed to continue working to deliver more vaccines to countries across the region so that we reach as many frontline workers and at-risk communities as possible with the COVID-19 vaccines. Meanwhile, we will continue to provide support in sharing credible information on preventive and health measures and deliver personal protective equipment and hygiene material to protect as many people as possible”.

**Notes for editors:**

COVAX is the vaccine facility of the Access to COVID-19 Tools Accelerator (ACT-A), a ground-breaking global collaboration to accelerate development, production, and equitable access to COVID-19 diagnostics, treatments, and vaccines.

COVAX is co-led by the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI), Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance (and the World Health Organization (WHO) – working in partnership with UNICEF as key implementing partner, as well as civil society organisations, vaccine manufacturers, the World Bank, and others.

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### **About WHO**

The World Health Organization works with 194 Member States across 6 regions and from more than 150 offices to provide global leadership in public health, promote health, keep the world safe and serve the vulnerable. Our goal for 2019-2023 is to ensure that a billion more people have universal health coverage, to protect a billion more people from health emergencies, and provide a further billion people with better health and well-being.

### **About UNICEF**

UNICEF works in some of the world’s toughest places, to reach the world’s most disadvantaged children. Across more than 190 countries and territories, we work for every child, everywhere, to build a better world for everyone.

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