

8 May 2019, Cairo, Egypt: The World Health Organization (WHO) strongly condemns continuing attacks on health facilities in north-western Syria. Since 28 April, in just 9 days, 12 health structures have been hit.

On 5 May, 3 facilities were struck in one day alone, including 2 major hospitals that provide secondary health care in the area. One of the structures, a surgical unit, was supported by WHO. Three health care workers lost their lives as a result of these attacks. There are now no functioning hospitals in northern Hama, and emergency care is provided by only 3 surgical units supported by WHO. Close to 300 000 civilians are affected.

“These attacks against health facilities and other civilian infrastructure are a grave and totally unacceptable development,” said Dr Ahmed Al-Mandhari, WHO Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean. “International humanitarian law safeguards civilians, even in the most violent of conflicts.

And according to the Geneva Convention, health facilities and civilians – especially the most vulnerable – must be protected. Parties to the conflict in northern Hama and in Idlib are flagrantly disregarding those rules; and it is women, children, the elderly and other vulnerable groups who are suffering as a result.”

The health facilities that were hit in northern Hama and southern Idlib provided a total of 30 000 consultations, 860 hospital admissions and 700 surgeries per month to a highly vulnerable population.

“We are also deeply concerned about the people who have had to flee their homes and now have no access to basic health services. Over 150 000 people were displaced from northern Hama and southern Idlib in between 29 April and 4 May, doubling the total number of people displaced in the area in the last 3 months. Saving their lives is our main priority and this requires further strengthening available health services. What is of particular concern is the increasing risk for infectious disease outbreaks due to overcrowding in temporary settlements,” Dr Al-Mandhari added.

WHO continues – with health partners – to ensure the provision of key primary and secondary health care and has released emergency health supplies for almost 92 200 treatment courses, including for surgical and trauma care, secondary health care, and primary health care.

As the conflict in north-western Syria intensifies, WHO reminds all parties to the conflict that attacks on health facilities are a blatant violation of international humanitarian law. Health facilities must never be attacked or damaged, and health workers should be allowed to provide medical treatment and services to all people in need wherever they are.

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