Statement by Dr Ala Alwan, WHO Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean

Cairo, 3 March, 2016 -- The health situation in Syria continues to deteriorate, not just day by day, but hour by hour. As always in conflict, it is innocent civilians that pay the highest price. Almost two thirds of all Syrians have no access to safe water, putting them at risk of diseases like typhoid and cholera. Throughout the country, almost 300 000 pregnant women are not getting the care they need for a safe and healthy pregnancy. Every month, more than 30 000 people need treatment for injuries. People with chronic diseases are dying of complications that are easily controlled under normal circumstances. Half of all children are missing out on life-saving vaccinations, and one in 4 children is at risk of developing a mental health disorder that will have a long-term impact.

Despite these critical needs, more than half of the country's health care facilities are either closed or only partially functioning and facing critical shortages in life-saving and essential medicines. Half of all health professionals have fled the country and those that remain are at constant risk of attack. As the conflict continues, more lives are lost every day, not just due to the violence, but as people become victims of a failing health system that can no longer provide them with the health services they need to stay alive. Millions of lives are at risk.

Earlier this year, the international donor community came together in London and declared their commitment to helping people inside Syria and in neighbouring countries affected by the conflict. And yet, almost one month later WHO and health partners are still waiting for urgently-needed funding to arrive. Lack of funding will only lead to increasing numbers of preventable deaths: for every one million dollars the health sector does not receive, more than 230 000 people are left without access to health care. This unnecessary morbidity and loss of lives should not be allowed to continue.

I urge the international donor community to fulfil their commitment and fill critical funding gaps faced by the health sector. US\$ 437.21 million is urgently required to meet growing health needs. Without this support, millions of people affected by this crisis will be left without the health services they need, further adding to this devastating humanitarian tragedy.

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