

Danascys, Syria, 2 July 2014 – Recent and increasing interruptions of access to safe drinking water in Syria are compounding the dire water, sanitation and health conditions for hundreds of thousands of internally displaced and vulnerable people inside Syria. This has resulted in a high risk of outbreaks of water- and food-borne diseases, such as typhoid, hepatitis A, cholera, and other diarrhoeal diseases during the current summer season.

Water and sanitation systems have significantly deteriorated over the past year, with a breakdown of the main water supply networks and widespread pollution of water, including in the Euphrates River, which is a primary source of drinking water for the northern and eastern governorates in Syria. In 2014, the lowest rainfall precipitation on record has resulted in unprecedented drought and this is contributing to a worsening situation.

On 2 June, an explosion caused damage to water, sewage and electrical networks, resulting in a severe loss of capacity to pump water to Aleppo City, and leaving an estimated 2 million people without regular water supply. The situation remains critical. To date, safe access to the pumping station has not been secured, and the repairs will require three weeks of work to complete.

In Deir ez-Zor, the reported cuts to the water and electricity supply have contributed to the spread of diseases, and health workers continue to report increased cases of suspected typhoid. The Early Warning and Response System (EWARS) has reported over 1650 cases of suspected typhoid in Deir ez-Zor governorate, mostly in Al-Bukamal and Al-Mayadin towns. Also, recent reports of military action in East Ghouta may further affect water supplies to host communities and neighbouring areas.

The United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) and the World Health Organization (WHO) urgently call on parties to the conflict in Syria to halt using access to safe water and other vital services as a tactic of war. UNICEF and WHO call for an immediate ceasefire in Bustan Al-Basha in Aleppo to enable the Syrian Arab Red Crescent (SARC) and technical experts to safely access the area for repairs.

We re-state the urgent need for unimpeded access for the delivery of life-saving humanitarian assistance, including safe water, health and hygiene supplies, to vulnerable populations to mitigate the risk of disease outbreaks this summer.

Finally, we urge the international community to prioritise the dire humanitarian needs of the Syrian people and extend all of its influence and advocacy to end the targeting of water supplies and to immediately facilitate humanitarian access.

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