

DAMASCUS, 1 February 2022 – 3 996 000 doses of the Johnson & Johnson's Janssen COVID-19 vaccine arrived in Syria on 26 of January, donated by Italy through the COVAX Facility.

In May last year, as chair of the G20, Italy hosted the Global Health Summit alongside the European Commission, which saw many European countries pledge to share millions of vaccine doses to priority countries like Syria, boosting short-term supplies.

The European Union (EU) and its Member States are so far the biggest donor of COVID-19 vaccines in the world, having shared over 350 million doses for donation to countries, via the COVAX Facility (around 300 million) and bilaterally (over 45 million).

"Italy is donating doses to COVAX on top of the US\$ 470 million it has pledged to the Gavi COVAX Advance Market Commitment and this donation in particular will allow a large number of people in Syria to access vaccines now," said Italian Charge d'Affaires a.i. Massimiliano D'Antuono. "Italy stands by the Syrian population and, in cooperation with the EU humanitarian aid, UNICEF and WHO, supports the efforts in tackling the COVID-19 pandemic and in general the consequences of the dire humanitarian situation across the country," he continued.

The roll-out of the vaccines donated by Italy and the awareness campaign will be funded by EU humanitarian aid and implemented by WHO. The EU, in particular, is providing humanitarian support to WHO in Syria to help the health system deal with the ongoing pandemic and reach the target of 70% people being vaccinated by mid-2022. EU humanitarian funding allows for vaccine roll-out and the deployment of vaccination teams. Humanitarian aid is essential at a time when vulnerable Syrians and caregivers are not only threatened by COVID-19, but also by the consequences of continued conflict, economic decline and harsh winter conditions.

The Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the European Union to Syria Dan Stoenescu stated: "As part of our #TeamEurope humanitarian pledge to the Syrian people, the EU supports the vaccination efforts in Syria, where immunization against COVID-19 is lower than in other countries. The European Union is working hard with COVAX and vaccine manufacturers, with donors and other partners, to accelerate the delivery of doses worldwide, including in Syria. Our aim is to ensure that most of Syria's population is vaccinated by the end of this year. The generous donation of Italy is timely and will further help us reach this goal."

## Vaccine coverage in Syria is among the lowest globally

“Vaccine supply to Syria has been slow. While we aimed to vaccinate 20% of the population by end of December 2021, the available vaccines by then were only enough to cover 13% of the population. This consignment generously donated by the Government of Italy will reach an additional 20% of the population with life-saving COVID-19 vaccines,” said Akjema Magtymova, Head of Mission and WHO Representative in Syria. “Availability of vaccines is an important step in ensuring equitable vaccination, but so are vaccine administration and demand generation. We need to step up our concerted efforts to continue building public trust in COVID-19 vaccines to reach the national vaccination target of 40% by April this year and at least 70% by the end of 2022,” Dr Magtymova added.

The donated vaccines can be stored and transported using standard equipment for routine vaccines. This enables distribution to remote areas and provides an opportunity for the hardest-to-reach populations in the country to be protected with a single dose. Frontline workers, elderly, people with pre-existing conditions and eligible people continue to be prioritized for vaccination.

“This donation from the Government of Italy is incredibly timely and important in our fight against the pandemic. Unless we protect health workers and other frontline workers, health systems will continue to be overstretched and the most vulnerable women and children will lose access to life-saving services, jeopardizing years of progress and culminating in the poorest children falling behind,” said UNICEF Syria Representative Bo Viktor Nylund.

UNICEF and WHO will continue to support efforts to deliver vaccines safely through cold chain management, supporting vaccinators in fixed facilities and mobile teams, increasing testing and lab capacity to detect COVID-19 cases and prevent the further spread of the pandemic, and boosting public knowledge and confidence in vaccines.

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### Notes to editors

Just over 2.2 million doses of vaccines against COVID-19 have been administered in Syria to date. As of 24 January 2022, only 5.1% of the total population have been fully vaccinated, most

with two doses, and 10% have received at least one dose of the vaccine.

The numbers above do not include the figures from northwest of Syria. In the northwest, more than 287 000 people have received their first dose and nearly 146 500 people their second dose.

For more information, please contact:

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