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THE WAR IN SYRIA AND IRAQ:  
HUMANITARIAN ASPECTS

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GENERAL REPORT

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

I.	INTRODUCTION.....	1
II.	THE CONFLICT IN SYRIA AND IRAQ: AN UPDATE.....	1
III.	HUMANITARIAN CRISIS IN SYRIA AND IRAQ.....	4
	A. IMPLOSION OF SYRIA'S SOCIAL FABRIC.....	4
	B. THE EFFECTS OF WAR ON IRAQ.....	5
	C. VIOLATIONS OF INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN LAW.....	6
	D. HUMANITARIAN RELIEF ACTIVITIES.....	8
IV.	THE SYRIAN REFUGEE AND MIGRATION CRISIS.....	9
	A. THE IMMEDIATE NEIGHBOURHOOD.....	10
	B. MIGRANT ARRIVALS IN EUROPE AND THE EU-TURKEY AGREEMENT.....	12
V.	CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....	15
	BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	17

## I. INTRODUCTION

1. The 6-year-old war in Syria is the worst man-made disaster of this century. Over 400,000 people have been killed and approximately 1.5 million have been injured. Millions of people – including women and children – have been uprooted, suffering from arbitrary detention, torture, rape, kidnapping, food and water deprivation, inadequate shelter and a lack of medical support and education. In five years, the life expectancy of Syrians plummeted from an average of 71 years to 55.4 years, lower than in Afghanistan or Libya (Sparrow, 2017). The conflict in Syria, which spilled over to Iraq in 2014, and particularly the images from last year’s siege on Aleppo and the fight over Mosul as well as chemical attacks on the Syrian towns of Ghouta (2013) and Khan Sheikhoun (2017), took the brutality of war to a level unwitnessed before. As a result, many began to inquire into the violations of the laws of armed conflict and human rights—crimes which have tested the conscience of the world.

2. This report provides an update on the conflict in Syria and Iraq followed by an assessment of the scale of the humanitarian crisis. It also covers the humanitarian crisis inside Syria and the challenges for Syria’s neighbours and the Mediterranean region, primarily in the form of the refugee crisis. In addition, the report provides an overview of international humanitarian assistance to the Syrian people and offers some ideas on what more could be done to help the people in need.

## II. THE CONFLICT IN SYRIA AND IRAQ: AN UPDATE

3. The wars in Syria and Iraq are characterised by extraordinarily complex interrelationships between numerous belligerent parties and their divergent agendas. The complexity makes it extremely difficult to resolve the conflict diplomatically; however, the international community agrees that there is no military solution to this conflict.

4. The primary belligerents include the Assad regime—Syria’s 40-year Ba’athist family dynasty; the rebel opposition composed of secular and religious militias – backed by Western and Gulf countries – whose ethnic composition includes both Arabs and Kurds; and the Daesh<sup>1</sup> terrorist organisation that emerged in 2014 as an off-shoot of Al-Qaeda in Iraq. Bashar Al-Assad’s regime still governs large swaths of the country, including Syria’s capital Damascus. Analysts contend that the regime is winning the war in Syria today. The regime’s dominance could not have been realised if it were not for the generous military, intelligence, and logistical support from the regime’s allies, Russia, Iran, and Hezbollah. The Russian Air Force provides critical air support to Assad and Iran’s Revolutionary Guard provides equipment and advisors. Ground forces are, to a certain extent, led by the Lebanese-based insurgent group, Hezbollah (Sullivan, 2014). An important pillar of Assad’s military effort is the National Defense Forces, a pro-government militia consisting of local volunteers.

5. There are dozens of opposition/rebel forces in Syria. Many of them fall under the banner of the Free Syrian Army (FSA), which formed in reaction to the Assad regime’s brutal use of force against peaceful protesters in March 2011. The FSA and the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF – primarily Kurdish forces) are largely supported by the United States and some other NATO Allies as well as the Arab Gulf States—who provide military, logistics and communications, and non-lethal assistance. Finally, there are a number of radical rebel groups, such as Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, that periodically fight against the same enemy as the FSA, but who are supported by neither NATO-allied countries nor the United States.

6. Daesh was the latest non-state armed group to join the war in Syria. The group quickly set off to Syria to expand its so-called caliphate after confiscating Iraqi military equipment and

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<sup>1</sup> Arabic acronym of the terrorist organisation “Islamic State in Iraq and Syria”

achieving decisive victories in north and north-western Iraq (e.g., Ramadi and Mosul). The group receives international support in the form of foreign fighters from Asia, the Middle East, Europe, and the Americas. Daesh finances much of its activities by selling oil and ancient artefacts and taxing commercial activities within their territorial control.

7. 2015 was a seminal year for the war in Syria. The combined emergence of Daesh, the worsening Syrian migration crisis, and Russia's intervention internationalised the war unlike before. External actors were convinced, more than ever, that the outcome of the war had more than just regional consequences. Russian President Vladimir Putin's support for the Assad regime was steadfast from the beginning of the conflict, but Moscow did not initiate direct military involvement until September 2015. Russian involvement stepped up in 2016, allowing the regime to achieve important military victories, including the capture of Aleppo in December 2016. Experts suggest that Russian intervention in Syria also serves to maintain Moscow's strategic posture in the Middle East and the Mediterranean more generally—a posture that has been exercised for 40 years through Syria's port at Tartus (*The Economist*, 2015). However, Moscow's support for the Assad regime comes at a reputational cost for the Russians. Despite claiming that its goal in Syria is to fight terrorism, Moscow was *de facto* supporting the regime's actions, which include indiscriminate attacks on civilians and other non-combatants. The Syrian regime's actions left Moscow open to criticism and inquiry from the United Nations and other human rights observers (Cumming-Bruce and Barnard, 2017).

8. In sharp contrast is the international anti-Daesh campaign conducted by the Combined Joint Task Force (CJTF) coalition. The coalition is led by the United States and comprises 68 partners including NATO and Arab League states. The coalition's mission, *Operation Inherent Resolve*, includes confronting Daesh's online propaganda, addressing terrorist financing, and defeating Daesh on the battlefield. The coalition has trained over 65,000 Iraqi security forces since 2014 and liberated over 2 million people from Daesh-held territory (GC, 2017a). In the past three years, CJTF airstrikes have reduced Daesh's territory by 70% in Iraq and 51% in Syria (GC, 2017b). In 2016 alone, Daesh lost a quarter of its territory, which included between 12,000 to 35,000 square miles at its peak (BBC, 2017a; Gilsinan).

9. The coalition coordinates its air operations with the FSA and SDF<sup>2</sup> ground forces, who operate across northern Syria in tandem with Peshmerga and Iraqi forces, who operate in northern Iraq. Tensions persist within the global coalition; in particular, Ankara is weary of territorial gains by the SDF—a primarily Kurdish force—in northern Syria. Earlier in 2017, US-led ground operations expanded when the Pentagon deployed 400 Marines and Army Special Forces to Syria to support the offensive on Daesh's "capital", Raqqa. A decisive victory over Daesh is of strategic importance to the US-led intervention in Syria to preserve Iraqi sovereignty and counter global terrorist movements. However, depriving Daesh of its "caliphate" will likely not mean the end of the group – in fact, there are signs that Daesh is already adapting to a guerrilla-type warfighting mode.

10. Since the initial shock of swift Daesh victories in Iraq, the US-led coalition and the Iraqi government have escalated the war against Daesh considerably over the last two years. Last October, coalition forces began their military campaign to retake Mosul City (Gordon, 2017a). In the months leading up to October 2016, coalition forces retook half of Daesh's 126 cities (Almukhtar, 2016).

11. The hard-fought battle over Mosul, Iraq, was years in the making. It was the largest city Daesh held and the site of the group leader's declaration of the so-called Islamic State (i.e., Caliphate). Elite Iraqi Counter Terrorism Service (CTS) forces aided by US-led airstrikes initiated a two-front offensive on either side of the Tigris River and retook the city in segments (i.e., city blocks). Iraqi forces suffered a great number of casualties due to Daesh's use of car bombs, drones, and snipers. Much of the fighting in the Old City was especially hard fought given the

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<sup>2</sup> Not all members of the coalition coordinate their air operations with SDF.

density of the streets and structures (Lamothe et al., 2017). On 9 July 2017, Iraqi PM Haider al-Adadi declared Mosul liberated with the final pockets of Daesh's strongholds being cleared.

12. The global coalition's activities are aided by NATO's emerging role in Syria and Iraq. Currently, NATO allies provide Airborne Warning and Control Systems (AWAC) surveillance and signals intelligence to coalition ground forces in Iraq and Syria—complementing US air support. In January 2017, NATO allies, in coordination with the United States, also provided 10 military advisors to Baghdad to train Iraqi forces combatting Daesh. This programme is expected to expand in the coming year. At the NATO summit in Brussels in May 2017, Allied leaders decided to formally join the anti-Daesh coalition. This decision sends a strong political message of NATO's commitment to the fight against terrorism. It is expected to improve coordination within the coalition. However, the decision does not mean that NATO as an entity will engage in combat operations in Syria and Iraq.

13. Negotiations to end hostilities between the warring parties have endured many rounds—led by both the United Nations in Geneva and by the joint efforts of the Turkish, Russian and Iranian diplomats in Astana, Kazakhstan. The Geneva track is based on a roadmap endorsed by UN Security Council Resolution 2254, adopted in December 2015. The Resolution emphasises the indivisibility of Syria and envisages the establishment of a transitional government followed by democratic and inclusive elections in the country. It also excludes negotiations with Daesh, Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, and other designated terrorist organisations. Despite US and Russian diplomatic efforts, the roadmap remains unimplemented, mainly because Bashar al-Assad refuses to step down. Nevertheless, the resumption of Geneva talks in February 2017 aiming for the implementation of the roadmap has provided for limited yet incremental progress in this regard by engaging the Syrian parties in indirect negotiations on the components of the roadmap. The Geneva negotiations entered its sixth round in May 2017 (Collins, 2017).

14. A new diplomatic initiative was announced in December 2016, when Russian, Turkish and Iranian representatives managed to achieve a ceasefire between Assad and moderate opposition, to be followed by peace talks in Astana, Kazakhstan. The initiative received an endorsement from the UN Security Council. In early 2017, the ceasefire largely held in Syria, but not in the suburbs of Damascus as well as in the towns of Hama and Daraa. The talks succeeded in bringing about the formation of a trilateral ceasefire monitoring mechanism by Iran, Turkey and Russia. Additionally, at the fourth round of high-level talks in Astana, a memorandum on the creation of de-escalation areas was signed. However, the Astana talks were complicated by two main hurdles: 1) the Syrian opposition was dissatisfied with the Russian and Iranian mediators, who they saw as partial to the Assad regime; 2) Russian and Turkish officials failed to resolve disagreements in regard to the role Kurdish armed groups would play in the settlement.

15. However, some progress on a Syrian cessation of hostilities was made at the G20 summit in Hamburg, Germany. In his first meeting with Russian President Putin, the US President Donald Trump along with Jordanian counterparts negotiated a ceasefire and 'de-escalation agreement' between rebel forces and the Assad regime in southwestern Syria. It is still unclear if the agreement will hold up or be replicated in other parts of the country; however, the US State Department will likely work with its counterparts in Amman, Jordan, to establish mechanisms to monitor the ceasefire in July (Newsweek, 2017).

16. Some politicians and experts have suggested instituting a partial or country-wide no-fly or safe zone over Syria or de-escalation zones<sup>3</sup>. Some argue that – given the 'intervention fatigue' – a no-fly zone would be relatively non-intrusive and offer a low-cost alternative to conventional intervention (i.e., ground invasion), especially since the latter is unlikely to be authorised by the UN Security Council. A no-fly zone could improve the humanitarian situation by preventing

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<sup>3</sup> For instance, in 2017, Russia has proposed establishing four interim de-escalation zones.

indiscriminate airstrikes and bombings. It would be similar to the US no-fly zone established in Iraq in the early 1990s to protect Iraq's Kurdish population from Saddam Hussein's ethnic cleansing campaign. However, the Obama Administration rebuked the idea in 2013 and 2015 because such an undertaking would be unmanageable with Russian planes now flying in Syrian air space (Dettmer, 2017). The challenge of a no-fly zone would also require a massive commitment by US air assets and may risk confrontation with other actors, especially since the deployment of Russia's S-300 and S-400 air defence systems in Syria. From the moment they were elected President and Vice-President, Donald Trump and Mike Pence have signalled their initial support for the idea of no-fly zones (Tabler and Ross, 2016). Turkey established a de facto "terror-free safe zone" in northwest Syria after liberating Daesh-controlled areas through Operation Euphrates Shield, which allowed for the return of 50,000 Syrian refugees.

### III. HUMANITARIAN CRISIS IN SYRIA AND IRAQ

#### A. IMPLOSION OF SYRIA'S SOCIAL FABRIC

17. While the protracted conflict in Syria sent ripples across the entire region and beyond, the civilian population in Syria has been victim of countless horrors and human rights violations. Of the 22 million pre-war population, approximately 400,000 people were killed, and 1.5 million wounded. 13.5 million Syrians require immediate humanitarian assistance. At least 4.9 million were forced to flee Syria and of those that remain, 6 million are internally displaced. These numbers remained stable since the announcement of the December 2016 ceasefire, but the UN agencies do not expect them to decline in 2017.

18. The most vulnerable groups – children, women, the disabled and very old – have been hit particularly hard by the 6-year-old war. According to UNICEF, as of March 2017, 2.3 million Syrian **children** live as refugees, 6 million inside Syria are dependent on humanitarian assistance and more than 1.7 million children are out of school (UNICEF, 2017a). Many have been killed in attacks such as the deadly bombing of three schools in northern Syria's village of Hass in October 2016. At least 652 children were killed in 2016 alone – a 20% increase from 2015. Syrian children suffer from family separation, physical, psychological, and sexual violence and malnutrition. They are also vulnerable to recruitment by armed groups (over 850 children were recruited in 2016 – twice as many as in the previous year) and are increasingly taking part in combat roles, sometimes even as executioners. Child labour is another rapidly growing phenomenon in Syria (UNICEF, 2017b).

19. Syrian **women and young boys and girls** have suffered sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) throughout the war, particularly in areas controlled by Assad and Daesh. Assessing the incidence of SGBV is extremely difficult because victims are often unwilling or unable to share their stories, but there are numerous reports of systematic molestation and rape at government-controlled checkpoints as well as detention centres run by Assad's intelligence apparatus. It is estimated that the number of SGBV cases peaked in 2012-2014, when the regime was at its most vulnerable and possibly resorted to using rape as a weapon (Forestier, 2017). In the Daesh-controlled areas, women face punishment for violating Daesh's strict dress code; while women accused of adultery were given the death penalty (UNHRC, 2017a). Daesh has also been involved in abduction and sex trafficking of women and girls (Al Hussein, 2017). In addition, the frequency of early marriage among Syrians has increased dramatically since the outbreak of the conflict: today about ¼ of Syrian refugee girls between ages 15 and 17 are married. It is believed that early marriage is four times higher than it used to be among Syrians before the crisis (UNFPA, 2017).

20. The war has severely limited access to basic **health** care for Syrians. Currently, more than half of public healthcare facilities are either closed or only partially operational (UN, 2017). From March 2011 to July 2016, there have been 400 documented attacks on health facilities – more than 90% by Syrian and Russian air forces – and 797 medics killed on duty (Sparrow, 2017). In 2016 alone, there have been reports of up to 105 verified attacks on hospitals and healthcare centres

across Syria. The shortages in medical personnel, supplies and infrastructure have been particularly detrimental to the wounded, people living with chronic diseases, pregnant women and mentally disabled individuals. Further, a generation of children may never be vaccinated. One fifth of those in need of humanitarian assistance live with permanent disability (UN, 2017).

21. The Syrian **economy** has been completely devastated by the war. Four out of five Syrians live in poverty, and about 70% live in extreme poverty, supporting their families on less than \$2 per person, per day. At least seven million Syrians are unable to obtain the basic food required to meet their needs. Many Syrians do not have access to safe water because the price of water has skyrocketed – families spend over a quarter of their income to purchase water. Agricultural activity has decreased considerably, for example wheat production is a mere 55% compared to the pre-crisis average (UN, 2017).

22. The war has also dealt a heavy blow to Syria's extraordinary **cultural heritage**. As a result of fighting between the Assad forces and Daesh, many of the treasures of Palmyra, an ancient Roman city and a designated World Heritage Site, have been reduced to rubble – including the Temple of Bel and the façade of the II<sup>nd</sup> century amphitheatre. It has to be noted that the destruction of these sites was deliberate and had no military value (UNHCR, 2017a).

## **B. THE EFFECTS OF WAR ON IRAQ**

23. Today, 11 million Iraqis are in need of humanitarian assistance with just over half having received aid (OCHA, 2017e). In the three years after Abou Bakr al Baghdadi declared his so-called caliphate, over 4.8 million Iraqis have been displaced (IOM et al., 2017). Still today, there are over 3 million Iraqi internally displaced persons (IDPs) with up to 860,000 from Mosul alone (Amnesty International, 2017b; WHO, 2017; OCHA, 2017e).

24. The humanitarian emergency in central and northern Iraq can be attributed to two causes: the rise of Daesh and the subsequent military campaign against the group. From 2013-2014 Daesh swept quickly from Ramadi to Mosul (and into Syria as well) where Iraqis were either trapped in Daesh-won territory or forced to flee (AFP, 2017). By the time the United States mobilised a global coalition, with the consent of the Iraqi government, to combat the group in 2014, Daesh held between 12,000 to 35,000 square miles (Gilsinan, 2014). Today, Daesh's territory in Iraq and Syria is substantially diminished. Though successful the campaign against Daesh came with a tragic cost to non-combatants across central and northern Iraq. The coalition applies strict targeting protocols to limit civilian casualties. Nevertheless, Amnesty International cites that intense airstrikes by coalition forces may have been responsible for 5,805 civilian deaths between February and June 2017—in one such an attack on 17 March 2017, 105 civilians were killed in an airstrike targeting Daesh snipers (Amnesty International, 2017c).

25. Mosul's civilian infrastructure and religious and cultural treasures were destroyed in the most recent offensive. Preliminary analysis by the United Nations Institute for Training and Research identified 5,536 affected structures (categories: destroyed, severely damaged and moderately damaged) as of 30 June 2017. On 22 June, Daesh destroyed the Grand al-Nuri Mosque and its minaret al-Hadba—a symbol of Mosul, which stood in the city since the 12<sup>th</sup> century (Bosh and Chmaytelli, 2017).

26. People across northern and central Iraq face a number of humanitarian challenges since 2014. The destruction of land for livestock grazing by the combination of fighting and limited mobility created serious food insecurity. Food supply shortages also persist and are constantly being attended to by UN coordinated efforts. Water shortages and sanitation infrastructure damage has created public health risks around Mosul City. Over 1.3 million people have been reached with water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) aid, but current water production and delivery capacity is stretched, especially with high summer temperatures. Among those displaced since January, 140,744 are children, of whom 74,000 are not accessing any form of education. The scarcity of

electricity, which serves cooling needs, affects the possibility of students and teachers to focus in schools in camps (WHO, 2017).

27. Under Daesh's control, women and minority communities across Iraq have been victimised. Violence against women and girls is no exception, either. They face both *de facto* and *de jure* discrimination and SGBV. Amnesty International reports that the perilous situation for Yazidis persists with 4,000 Yazidi women still in Daesh captivity. Young men and boys are also affected—caught between Daesh's rule, Iraqi non-state militias, and the Iraqi army. Males are either forcibly recruited or detained under harsh and inhumane conditions. Human rights groups have also recorded torture and other forms of ill-treatment. Religious groups are also targeted. Daesh has infamously targeted both Christian and Yazidi populations and, lesser known targeting of Iraq's Shi'as (Amnesty International, 2017b).

### C. VIOLATIONS OF INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN LAW

28. The belligerents of the war in Syria – particularly Daesh, pro-Assad forces and Jabhat Fateh al-Sham (previously Jabhat al-Nusra) – have committed numerous, systematic and brutal violations of international humanitarian law, also known as the rules of war. In February 2014, the United Nations Security Council unanimously adopted Resolution 2139 that demanded “that all parties immediately cease all attacks against civilians, as well as the indiscriminate employment of weapons in populated areas, including shelling and aerial bombardment, such as the use of barrel bombs, and methods of warfare which are of a nature to cause superfluous injury or unnecessary suffering”. This Resolution continues to be violated by the belligerents.

29. Breaches of international humanitarian law attracted intense international concern and caused a global outcry during the siege of eastern **Aleppo**. Assad forces have been applying “kneel or starve” tactics towards rebel-controlled Aleppo and other besieged cities for years, but in late 2016 the battle for Aleppo entered a new phase of destructiveness. Supported by Russia, regime forces began systematically annihilating eastern Aleppo, with complete disregard for civilian life - and, in fact, deliberately targeted civilian infrastructure. It is estimated that at least 90% of eastern Aleppo's inhabitants were civilians. Almost 3,500 civilians were reportedly killed by military action between June and December 2016 (Czuperski et al., 2017). During that period, Syrian and Russian airstrikes indiscriminately hit hospitals<sup>4</sup>, schools and markets. The regime's aim was to terrorise and demoralise the population. The besieged population had no opportunity to escape and the supply of food, water and medication was cut off.

30. International intervention to halt the targeting of civilians in Aleppo was hampered by the lack of consensus among the UN Security Council. On 5 December 2016, Russia and China vetoed a United Nations Security Council resolution drafted by New Zealand, Spain, and Egypt that called for a ceasefire in Aleppo. Western leaders have stressed the responsibility of the Assad regime, Russia, and Iran for the carnage in Aleppo and the failure to ensure the evacuation of the civilian population. Finally, through the ceasefire established by the initiative of Turkey and Russia, the evacuation of opposition fighters and the remaining civilians in eastern Aleppo was agreed. The evacuation began in mid-December but was mired with delays, harassment, intimidation and robbing. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the Syrian Arab Red Crescent (SARC) facilitated the evacuation of approximately 45,000 people from the eastern part of the city. Not all of the besieged were saved – reportedly, over 1,800 people were arrested in December and some were executed (Czuperski et al., 2017). Hundreds of men and boys were separated from their families and forcibly conscripted by the Syrian army (UNHRC, 2017b).

<sup>4</sup> A particularly shocking war crime was the bombing of the two largest hospitals in besieged eastern Aleppo, which serve a quarter of a million civilians. UN Human Rights Council investigators found no military targets in or around the vicinity of either hospital, nor were warnings given prior to any given attack as required by international humanitarian law. Furthermore, the fact that the same hospitals were repeatedly bombarded simultaneously strongly suggests that pro-government forces were targeting these hospitals intentionally.

31. On 19 December 2016, the United Nations Security Council adopted Resolution 2328 on the humanitarian situation in Aleppo. This resolution, promoted by France, facilitated the implementation of the evacuation of civilians under United Nations supervision and guaranteed immediate and unconditional access for humanitarian assistance to populations (*France Diplomatie*, 2017). The re-population of eastern Aleppo continues today and by April 2017 more than 150,000 IDPs were registered in the newly accessible areas of Aleppo city – but the scope of destruction of the city’s vital infrastructure as well as the abundance of explosive remnants of war are hampering civilian returns (OCHA, 2017a).

32. Aleppo was only one of 13 besieged sites in Syria. In total, there are more than 600,000 besieged Syrians suffering from a lack of basic commodities and medical care and deprived of their freedom of movement (OCHA, 2017b). Over the course of the war, roughly 1.2 million civilians have been under siege in Syria; 1.1 million were besieged by the Assad regime (Sparrow, 2017).

33. The use of **prohibited weapons** and warfighting tactics in the war in Syria has been systematic and well-documented. Specifically, the Assad regime is notorious for its use of cluster munitions and ‘barrel bombs’ (improvised unguided explosive devices). The use of these inaccurate and indiscriminate weapons causes extreme harm to civilians. The images of Syrian children injured by these weapons posted across social media have outraged the international community. Russia has been rejecting accusations of using incendiary weapons in Syria, but such denials were exposed as false. Photographs and videos from Russian media and Russia’s Ministry of Defence evidenced the use of cluster munitions including RBK-500 ZAB-2.5S/M incendiary cluster weapons being loaded onto Russian Su-34 aircraft (Czuperski et al., 2017). Daesh has also been widely using the tactics of leaving numerous concealed improvised explosive devices (IEDs) as they retreat from territories previously under their control (UNHRC, 2017a).

34. Alarmingly, Syrian government forces have been using chemical weapons – chlorine bombs – against civilian targets. The inquiry led by the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons found that the Assad regime used chlorine gas in attacks in Idlib province in 2014 and 2015 (Czuperski et al., 2017), and that Daesh used mustard gas in at least one attack, while the UN Human Rights Council (UNHCR) report lists a number of additional incidents, including in 2017 (UNHRC, 2017a). Chemical substances are either air-dropped or transported by improvised rockets. The use of chlorine is prohibited by the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons and on their Destruction, to which the Syrian Arab Republic is a party.

35. The international community was shocked and outraged at reports of a chemical – sarin gas – attack on the rebel-held town of Khan Sheikhoun in north-western Syria on 4 April 2017. More than 80 people were killed in the airstrike, including more than 30 children, and hundreds were injured. There is ample evidence that the crime was committed by the Syrian regime. For instance, based on the analysis of blood and environmental samples, the French government established that the attack bears the signature of the Assad regime. The US military radar systems also provided evidence linking the airstrike to the regime’s Shayrat airbase. On 7 April 2017, in response to the horrific chemical attack, US President Donald Trump authorised a cruise missile attack on Shayrat airbase. The US strikes were widely considered necessary and appropriate by the Euro-Atlantic community and beyond.

36. Daesh fighters have been using civilians as human shields in military operations: for instance, when they took around 500 civilians to protect themselves while retreating from Minbij in August 2016 (UNHRC, 2017a).

37. The Syrian regime is also using its **prison** system to terrorise the opposition. Amnesty International recorded atrocities in the infamous Saydnaya military prison. The human rights group cites that Saydnaya has been turned into a “human slaughterhouse”: between 5,000 and 13,000 civilians have been killed there after being repeatedly tortured and systematically deprived of food, water and medical care. Reportedly, the victims were not rebel fighters, but civic activists, human rights advocates, journalists and other civilians perceived by the government as a threat (The Washington Post, 2017). In territories controlled by Jabhat Fatah al-Sham and Daesh, militants continue to carry out summary executions of civilians including women accused of adultery and homosexual men and boys (OHCHR, 2017).

38. The sweeping majority of international humanitarian law violations has been committed by Daesh, the Syrian regime and Jabhat Fatah al-Sham. However, the record of some **rebel groups** has not been above reproach either. The Kurdish People’s Protection Units (YPG) and Syrian Democratic Forces have been criticised for not providing adequate humanitarian aid to communities that were displaced as a result of the military activities of these opposition groups (OHCHR, 2017). YPG forces also reportedly continue to forcibly conscript men and boys for military service (UNHRC, 2017a).

#### D. HUMANITARIAN RELIEF ACTIVITIES

39. The international community, led by the UN, has launched a massive humanitarian relief operation to deliver lifesaving assistance to the people of war-stricken Syria and affected neighbouring countries. It is a complex effort because it is conducted from several geographical hubs: an office in Damascus (led by the UN Resident Humanitarian Coordinator), an office in Amman, Jordan (UN Regional Humanitarian Coordinator) and presences in Turkey, Lebanon and Iraq. This “Whole of Syria” approach is designed to reach as many people in need as possible: rather than relying exclusively on the collaboration with the Syrian government, humanitarian workers also conduct cross-border activities from several directions, sometimes even without the permission of the government (such activities were endorsed by UN Resolution 2165 as a reaction to the Syrian government’s systematic obstruction of humanitarian aid deliveries to rebel-controlled areas). Nevertheless, government-controlled areas continue to receive the bulk of the international humanitarian assistance – according to the UN assessment, 64% of all assistance in 2016, although only 54% of people in need live in government-controlled areas (excluding Daesh-controlled territories). UN agencies in particular tend to work in government-controlled areas – these areas received 72% of the total UN response in 2016. Non-governmental organisations (NGOs), on the other hand, focus largely on opposition controlled territories (61% of total NGO response in 2016). Daesh-controlled areas are largely closed for humanitarian deliveries (Meininghaus and Heinemann-Gruder, 2017).

40. UN agencies are the principle providers of humanitarian assistance: their operations constituted 74% of the overall response either through direct implementation or in collaboration with NGO partners. NGO operations constituted 26% of the overall response. About a quarter of all aid is delivered cross-border while the rest is delivered via regular programmes from inside Syria. In 2016, UN inter-agency assistance reached nearly 1.3 million people in Syria. However, more than 300,000 people in need were affected that year, when dispatched UN convoys were unable to deliver assistance. According to the UN data, in January-April 2017, assistance was delivered to about 564,000 people in hard-to-reach and besieged areas, mainly via convoys and airdrops.

41. The UN has raised almost \$1.5 billion for its humanitarian activities in Syria for 2016 – less than 50% of what it originally hoped for. This situation is not new –UN appeals have been significantly underfunded since 2011, which translates into cuts to food aid and material assistance (Humud et al., 2017). Among the most generous donors are the United States (\$5.9 billion since 2012) and the European Union (over €9.4 billion since the outbreak of the war, but this includes assistance to neighbouring countries hosting Syrian refugees) (European Commission, 2017). For 2017, the UN estimates it will need \$3.4 billion to address the humanitarian needs of 13.5 million

people within Syria. In addition, the UN and more than 240 partners launched the Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan (3RP) for 2017 and 2018, appealing for \$4.63 billion to assist Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq and Egypt as major hosts of Syrian refugees (OCHA, 2017c). The leading international initiative to raise the needed funds was the Supporting Syria and the Region conference, held in London in February 2016 and co-chaired by the European Union, Germany, Kuwait, Norway, Qatar, the United Kingdom and the United Nations. The conference raised over US\$12 billion in pledges – \$6 billion for 2016 and a further \$6.1 billion for 2017-2020. A follow-up conference took place in Brussels on 5 April 2017 to recommit to its 2016 pledges in London. Specifically in Brussels, donors committed to \$6 billion in 2017 and \$3.7 billion for 2018-2020 (European Council, 2017).

42. Joint humanitarian assistance efforts continue to encounter enormous obstacles in Syria. The most significant challenge is the physical insecurity of humanitarian workers. It is estimated that, during the conflict, 87 humanitarian workers (mostly Syrians employed by UN agencies as well as organisations such as ICRC/SARC and *Médecins sans Frontières*) have been killed, and 50 have been kidnapped or incarcerated. The list of victims also includes some 155 murdered members of the Syrian Civil Defense Union—the so-called White Helmets—civilian volunteers dedicated to recovering fellow Syrians from rubble and rescuing them from chemical attacks (Sparrow, 2017). A particularly gruesome attack occurred in September 2016, when a government-authorized 31-vehicle UN aid convoy was bombed, killing 18 civilians including one aid worker. The attack is widely believed to have been carried out by either Russian or Syrian government forces (UNHRC, 2017b).

43. Aid workers also continue to face restrictions from the Syrian authorities. In April 2016, the Syrian government's bureaucratic procedures to authorise humanitarian convoys were streamlined, and the approval rates on the national level have increased to about two-thirds of UN requests. However, this has been offset by increased hurdles on a local level: between May and December 2016, only 38% of the approved population actually received that aid (O'Toole, 2017). In December 2016, only one convoy was allowed to deliver assistance to 6,000 people out of a total of more than 900,000 people that the UN wanted to reach that month. In January 2017, the UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, Stephen O'Brien, noted that UN agencies "continue to be blocked at every turn" (OCHA, 2017d). The situation somewhat improved in the beginning of 2017: in January-April, the UN was able to dispatch 14 convoys to besieged and hard-to-reach areas.

#### **IV. THE SYRIAN REFUGEE AND MIGRATION CRISIS**

44. The humanitarian crisis caused by the war in Syria has expanded far beyond Syrian borders. The first migrants to flee the violence in Syria were 5,000 refugees who crossed into Lebanon in March 2011. Today, over five million Syrians are registered as refugees: if hostilities continue, Syrians may soon take over the status of the world's largest refugee population from Palestinians. In addition to the exodus of the Syrians, there is about a quarter of a million Iraqi refugees. Unlike the refugee situation in parts of East Africa, 91% of Syrian refugees do not live in camps; instead, they occupy urban, peri-urban and rural parts of their host countries. Approximately a quarter of Syrian refugees are between the ages of 18-59, and gender parity is nearly equivalent with 51.5% male refugees and 48.5% female (UNHCR, 2017a).

45. According to UNHCR, in 2017, there is a notable trend of spontaneous returns to and within Syria: reportedly, more than 440,000 IDPs have returned to their homes in Syria during the first six months of this year. Moreover, since 2015, some 260,000 refugees have spontaneously returned to Syria, primarily from Turkey into northern Syria. The main reasons for these returns include seeking out family members, checking on property, and perceived improvement in security conditions in parts of the country. These voluntary returns pose an additional challenge to UN agencies: UNHCR believes conditions for refugees to return in safety and dignity are not yet in

place in Syria and access to displaced populations inside Syria remains difficult, including to newly accessible areas.

## A. THE IMMEDIATE NEIGHBOURHOOD

46. The Syrian refugee crisis presents an enormous challenge for the recipient countries, particularly in the immediate neighbourhood. The region (i.e., Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey) as a whole is home to over 5.1 million refugees (UNHCR, 2017a).

Population of U.N.-Registered Syrian Refugees in the Middle East and Africa (MENA) Countries	
Turkey	3,049,879
Lebanon	1,011,366
Jordan	661,114
Iraq	241,406
Egypt	122,228

Source: UNHCR, 2017a

47. Among the five countries hosting Syrian refugees, **Turkey's** institutions are the most capable in their response. The services provided, in and out-of-camp, are coordinated by Turkey's Interior Ministry's Directorate General of Migration Management (DGMM). DGMM cites that in the last six years the government spent \$12 billion on Syrian refugees—who make up almost 4% of the country's population (ECHO, 2017). Domestic legal rights for Syrian (and Iraqi) refugees continue to expand across Turkey and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan alluded that refugees may be granted Turkish citizenship in the future (Al Jazeera, 2017a). Since the war in Syria began, there has been an uptick in violence and terrorism in Istanbul, Ankara and in southern parts of the country. However, Syrian refugees have posed little direct threat to Turkey's stability. Turkey has enhanced border security and is building a border wall; however, the country maintains an open border policy with Syria, but most official entry points into the country are closed (Devranoglu and Coskun, 2016; OCHA, 2016). Authorities do open border crossings in cases of humanitarian emergencies.

48. **Lebanon** is home to the most Syrian refugees per capita in the MENA region with the Syrian population equalling 20% of the country's 4.5 million citizens. Before the war in Syria, Lebanon was already home to nearly 450,000 Palestinian refugees (UNRWA, 2014). Lebanon is neither party to the 1951 Refugee Convention nor the treaty's 1967 protocols, therefore refugees are not afforded their full rights in the Lebanese Republic (United Nations, 2017). However, UN agencies, the Lebanese Government's Ministry of Social Affairs and NGO partners have coordinated Syrian refugee protection and assistance through the Lebanon Crisis Response Plan (LCRP) (UNDP and UNHCR, 2016). The United Nations' coordinated appeal for humanitarian assistance to implement LCRP activities was \$1.9 billion and half of that was funded in 2016 (UNHCR, 2017a). Lebanon is often thought of as a transit hub for Syrian migrants. Beirut, the capital, and Tripoli, the second largest city, are departure points for Syrians traveling to Turkey or other parts of Europe.

49. Perhaps there is no greater symbol of the enormity of the Syrian refugee crisis than **Jordan's** Zaatari refugee camp, which was once the country's fourth largest city. The population at Zaatari peaked in 2013, and now stands at around 70,000 (UNICEF, 2015). Refugees account for 10% of the country's population. Jordan, like Lebanon, is familiar with refugee populations based on its experience with the Palestinians. Historically, the state has been more accommodating to refugees where many Palestinians today enjoy Jordanian citizenship. As is the case in Lebanon, UN agencies, the Jordanian Government's Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation, and NGO partners are implementing a unique national plan in Jordan. The Jordanian Response Plan (JRP) aims to coordinate humanitarian assistance activities across the country. A unique aspect of the JRP is the establishment of a number of special economic zones to support Syrian refugee livelihoods in the medium-term (through 2019). Also, as of October 2016, the Jordanian

government issued over 30,000 work permits to Syrian refugees (UNDP and UNHCR, 2016). Except for the Daesh-related attack in December 2016, Jordan has largely eluded violence and/or terrorism domestically.

50. **Iraq** faces unique challenges in comparison to the other MENA countries because while it hosts Syrian refugees, over three million of its own people are internally displaced and nearly 220,000 are refugees beyond Iraq's borders (UNHCR, 2017e). Iraq's Ministry of Migration and Displacement and the Kurdish Regional Government's (KRG) Interior Ministry work in close coordination with UNHCR to provide humanitarian assistance to displaced Kurdish and Arab populations (UNDP and UNHCR, 2016). Coordination with the KRG is attributed to the fact that while some Syrians relocated to Anbar and Baghdad, most Syrian refugees are living in the Kurdish-majority north (UNHCR, 2017a). The KRG has provided permanent and temporary shelter to refugees and is working with UN agencies to provide protection and temporary assistance.

51. **Egypt** hosts a limited number of Syrian refugees in the capital, Cairo, and Giza (UNHCR, 2017a). The Egyptian government, which is party to the 1951 Refugee Convention, extends Syrians full access to public education, health care and even to services subsidised by the Egyptian state including, energy, transportation, and food as they provide to Egyptian nationals. The Syrian population in Egypt, through business associations, help refugees with employment and vocational training (UNDP and UNHCR, 2016). At the same time, Egypt faces a number of domestic challenges since the popular uprising in 2011 that challenged governance and put a strain on Egypt's recovering economy. These challenges may impact Syrian refugees, but have so far not been an issue due to regional and global support.

52. The enormity and urgency of the Syrian refugee crisis invoked a hasty and dissimilar response across MENA's five refugee hosting countries. **UNHCR** responded by developing a coordinated agenda for humanitarian assistance for UN agencies, the 200 humanitarian partner organisations, and the five MENA host governments. 3RP is a short to medium term plan to support refugee livelihoods. As the war in Syria is in its seventh year and 3RP is in its third year of implementation, more developmental and durable solutions<sup>5</sup> are becoming priorities.

53. Delivery of humanitarian assistance internationally and through national response plans would not be possible if it were not for the financial support of the international community over the last six years. 2016 was a watershed year for long term international financial assistance culminating in the Supporting Syria & the Region Conference in London (2016) and Brussels (2017), which galvanised financial support pledges for humanitarian assistance to Syria, but also to other MENA countries through 2020. However, despite international donor drives, UNHCR's 3RP funding reports suggest that while the international community is financing 3RP programming in MENA countries, many of the 3RP national programmes are underfunded - 60% on average (UNHCR, 2017a). In 2017, the UNHCR appealed for \$4.6 billion for activities in Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq and Egypt (UNHCR and UNDP, 2016). As of 1 June 2017, only 18% of this has been funded (UNHCR, 2017a).

54. The burden experienced by MENA governments and societies, as migration continues to increase, will eventually lead to host fatigue. In fact, states across MENA are already instituting new restrictions on Syrian migrants. For example, Lebanon instituted visa rules and travel restrictions for all new Syrian migrants and those who cross the border multiple times a year. As previously mentioned, most of the border crossings between Turkey and Syria are closed (UNHCR, 2016b). Lebanon, Jordan, and Iraq do not grant full rights to refugees as guaranteed in the 1951 Convention because they are not party to it. In fact, Egypt and Turkey are the sole signatories of the five MENA countries (United Nations, 2017).

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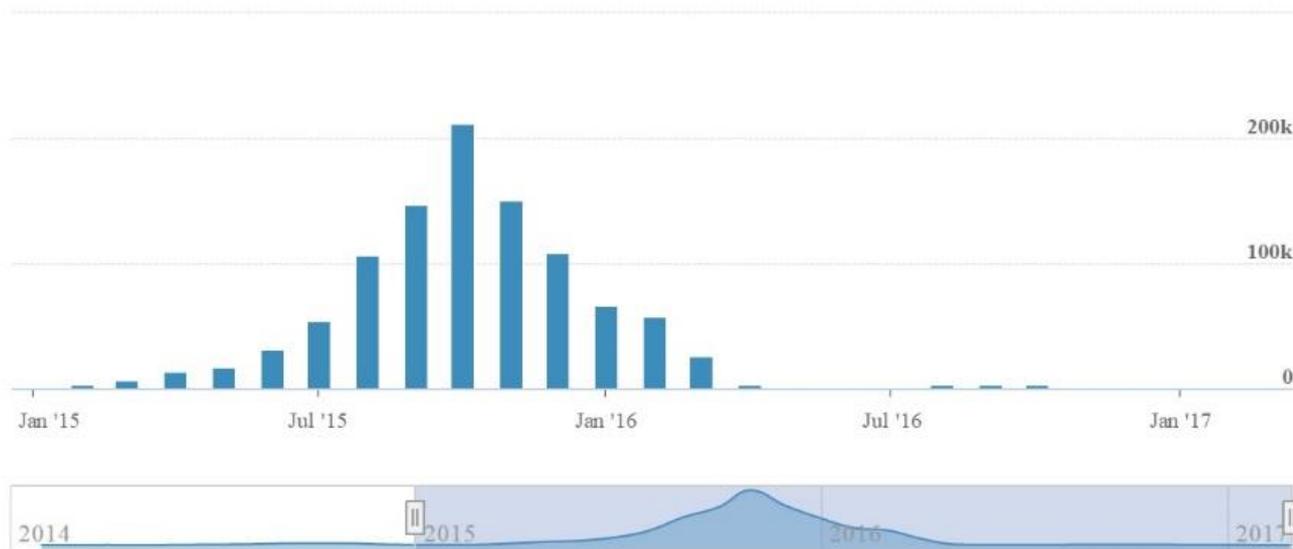
<sup>5</sup> UNHCR's durable solutions framework includes resettlement, repatriation, and integration. Refugees are either resettled in a third country; repatriated in their home country after it is declared safe; or integrated into the country in which they were made a refugee (UNHCR, 2003).

## B. MIGRANT ARRIVALS IN EUROPE AND THE EU-TURKEY AGREEMENT

55. Many Syrians forced to flee from the atrocities of war sought to resettle beyond the MENA region where they can find better living conditions. It is for this reason that Syrians choose to take the perilous journey across the Mediterranean and Aegean seas to resettle in Europe. Between April 2011 and May 2017, European countries received 952,446 official Syrian asylum applications (UNHCR, 2017a). Syrians make up 8% of migrants crossing the Mediterranean, but Syrians (47%) and Iraqis (13%) make up the majority of migrants to Greece exclusively (UNHCR, 2017b; UNHCR, 2017c).

56. Since Turkey began enforcing the EU-Turkey Statement, better known as the EU-Turkey Deal, on 20 March, 2016, the flow of irregular migrants to Greece slowed dramatically from its October 2015 peak (European Council, 2016; UNHCR, 2017b). In fact, one month after the deal's implementation, monthly sea arrivals to Greece decreased by 96%. Daily crossings from Turkey to the Greek islands have gone down from 10,000 people in a single day in October 2015 to 52 a day currently (Boffey, 2017; European Commission, 2017b). In all of 2016, 173,450 migrants arrived on the Greek islands. 3,282 irregular migrants crossed the Turkish-Greek land border and 4,600 crossed into Bulgaria from Turkey. According to UNHCR, from January 2017 until May 2017, 70,877 people have arrived in Europe via the Mediterranean Sea. Of them, 16.5% were children, 11% women and 72.5% men. These statistics, though dramatic, are a significant decrease from 2015. In that year, over one million migrants crossed the Mediterranean including over 800,000 travelling through Greece alone (Clayton and Holland, 2015). Consequently, the number of lives lost in the Aegean Sea has also fallen substantially, from 1,100 in 2015-2016 to 70 in 2016-2017 (Boffey, 2017). However, the loss of life along all Mediterranean Sea routes has increased by 28% in the first half of 2017 as compared to the same period last year.

### Sea Arrivals, primarily in Greece and Italy (per month), 2015-2017



Source: UNCHR, 2017

57. Returns in the 'one for one' exchange are moving more slowly, however. The total number of migrants resettled in Europe in this 'one for one' framework since April 2016 is 6,254 as of June 2017 (European Commission, 2017b). Thousands of Syrians who made efforts to seek asylum in EU countries are currently stuck at entry-exit points or in detention centres in Turkey, Greece, Bulgaria, and as far as Northern France<sup>6</sup>. Incomplete progress has been made to either send asylum seekers back to their country of origin (or second country of asylum) or permanently

<sup>6</sup> Today, mainland Greece is home to 33,840 asylum seekers and the International Organization for Migration has identified over 62,000 stranded migrants and refugees.

settle them. Greek, EU authorities, and NGO partners have made some progress, however, to accommodate asylum seekers on Greek islands, but the large populations from 2015 and 2016 are making the situation untenable. Some national governments across Europe have detained asylum seekers since closing their borders. The border closures and detentions are prompting human rights advocates to investigate whether international law is being undermined (Amnesty International, 2017a). The realities of refugee populations in Italy, Greece, and other southern European countries brings into sharp relief the importance of making progress on resettlement. Asylum seekers are being relocated from Italy and Greece to other European countries extremely slowly. Of the 160,000 refugees, European countries agreed to accept according to the 2015 relocation agreement negotiated before the EU-Turkey deal, only 13% of relocations have been carried out so far: 13,825 from Greece and 6,458 from Italy. Only Malta and Finland fulfilled their quotas, and in absolute terms, Germany, France, and the Netherlands have relocated the most migrants (UNHCR, 2017d). The European Commission has threatened to use infringement procedures against the uncooperative member states. Nevertheless, one has to admit that the EU relocation quotas agreement is not working – not only because several countries (Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia and the UK) completely or partially opted out of this plan (Boffey, 2017), but also because some member states, such as the Baltic states, found it difficult to convince refugees to relocate to their countries and stay there rather than move on to countries like Germany and Sweden. The United States has accepted about 12,000 Syrian refugees since the civil war began in 2011. However, especially since the Paris attacks in November 2015, there has been a growing backlash in the United States against taking in refugees from Syria. The Canadian government, on the other hand, has developed a more ambitious resettlement programme taking in 25,000 Syrian refugees between November 2015 and February 2016.

58. The United Nations, the European Union, Europe's national governments, and NGOs continue their work to find durable solutions and resettle asylum seekers in 2017; however, the work to prevent irregular migration is unfinished. Large flows of irregular migrants continue along the western and central Mediterranean routes. The EU's newest efforts to address migration along these routes include European Union Naval Force Mediterranean (EUNAVFOR MED) Operation Sophia and Frontex Joint Operations Poseidon and Triton.

59. Operation Sophia was adopted in 2015 by United Nations Security Council Resolution 2240. The operation's mandate is "[...] to identify, capture and dispose of vessels and enabling assets used or suspected of being used by migrant smugglers or traffickers, in order to [...] disrupt the business model of human smuggling and trafficking networks in the Southern Central Mediterranean and prevent the further loss of life at sea." The mission was extended in mid-2016 through July 2017, adding two new components: (1) training and equipping the Libyan coastguards and navy and (2) disrupting small arms smuggling per the UN arms embargo on Libya. Twenty-five states are contributing to EUNAVFOR MED Operation Sophia consisting of 1,700 personnel with five naval units and six air assets. The current naval units come from Italy, Germany, Spain, the United Kingdom, and France. Similarly, the air assets were contributed by Spain, Italy, Luxembourg, and France. Greek, Belgian, Portuguese, and Slovenian naval and air assets were also operationalised in the past (EEAS, 2017; European Union, 2016). Missions led by the EUNAVFOR MED rescued roughly 40,000 migrants with its combined air and naval operations. The Italian authorities, specifically, arrested nearly 90 smugglers and confiscated over 300 vessels during its patrols (European Union, 2016).

60. Frontex Operations Poseidon and Triton are directed to enhance border surveillance and save distressed migrants in vessels near the coasts of Greece and Italy respectively. As of October last year, 140,000 migrants were saved. Based on Frontex operations, the EU launched the European Border and Coast Guard Agency on 6 October 2016 to support, monitor, and reinforce European national borders. The Agency will have a pool of 1,500 border guards and equipment yet to be determined (European Commission, 2016; European Union, 2016).

61. 2017 witnessed a shift in migrant sea rescues, specifically in the central Mediterranean route. In the first half of this year, NGOs made the most rescues of the 36,422 refugees with 35%. The Italian coast guard followed closely with 34% of rescues. EUNAVFOR MED and Frontex combined for 18% and commercial vessels rescued 16% of migrants across the Mediterranean (UNHCR, 2017f).

62. NATO, in urgent support of member-states Greece and Turkey, deployed its Standing NATO Maritime Group 2 in the Aegean Sea on 11 February, 2016 under the title Operation Sea Guardian (NATO, 2017b; NATO, 2016a). In March 2016, Frontex and NATO reached an agreement for the North Atlantic Alliance to cooperatively patrol the Aegean Sea. Between March and October 2016, 31 NATO ships from eight member countries served in coordination with Frontex, recording 10,000 patrol hours at sea (European Union, 2016). At last year's NATO Warsaw summit in July, the alliance agreed to extend operation Sea Guardian from the Aegean Sea to assist EUNAVFOR MED Operation Sophia in the western and central Mediterranean. On 26 October 2016, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg announced that NATO would move supportive assets to the central and western Mediterranean. NATO's mandate would be to provide situational awareness, counterterrorism at sea and logistical support to Operation Sophia in the central Mediterranean (NATO, 2016b).

63. The Syrian refugee crisis remains an acute political issue in Europe. The security crisis caused by terrorist attacks weakened public support for open border policies. Terrorist organisations Daesh and Al-Qaeda have well understood and exploited this trend: for instance, the perpetrators of the Stade de France attacks in Paris carried fake Syrian IDs. In the absence of an efficient common regional effort to host refugees and reduce economic migration, individual European countries have been revisiting their national approaches. In July 2017, the new leadership of France has adopted a plan to improve its hosting capacities of refugees, taking into account lessons from camps in Calais and Porte de la Chapelle in Paris, where hygiene conditions were disastrous. The plan aims to create 12,000 places of housing for asylum seekers and refugees before 2019. France is also willing to send an OPFRA (*Office français de protection des réfugiés et apatrides*) mission to Libya, Niger and Chad to study the viability of hotspots in reducing the number of economic migrants and asylum seekers. At the same time, members of the French government underlined a clear distinction between refugees and economic migrants, stressing if a person is denied political asylum, then he or she will not be allowed to stay in France and will be sent back to his/her homeland.

64. Long-term solutions for European countries and migrants alike have yet to be found. As long as the Syrian war rages on and repatriation remains unrealistic, Syrians will continue to seek refuge abroad. The EU-Turkey Deal seems to have served its purpose in reducing migration on the eastern route; however, the sources of Mediterranean migration go beyond the Syrian crisis and require attention from lawmakers and governments affected by this challenge.

## V. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

65. The Euro-Atlantic community unites the world's leading humanitarian aid providers. It is well positioned to assist those civilians affected by the Syrian war, and it has been using its financial and material, as well as human resources to save thousands and to provide vital assistance to millions. However, Europe and North America need to develop a far greater capacity to manage this crisis both within and beyond their borders alongside their international partners. Doing so makes sense not only from humanitarian, but also security standpoints.

66. In particular, the General Rapporteur would like to offer the following recommendations:

1. Work with all relevant stakeholders to ensure that the current ceasefire is sustained and/or re-instituted; support the efforts to find a political solution to the Syrian conflict on the basis of the road map stipulated by the UN Security Council Resolution 2254 (2015).
2. Apply all diplomatic and political pressure to force all combatants of the Syrian war to respect the law of armed conflict and international humanitarian law, as well as to grant full access and cooperation to humanitarian aid workers and ensure their safety.
3. Consider establishing and enforcing safe/non-fly zones in Syria – exempting areas controlled by Daesh and Jabhat Fatah al-Sham – if the humanitarian situation continues to deteriorate.
4. Make it very clear that those committing crimes against humanity will be prosecuted. Continue collecting evidence on violations of human rights and international humanitarian law in Syria, and support the establishment of the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to assist in the Investigation and Prosecution of Persons Responsible for the Most Serious Crimes under International Law committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011, as envisaged by the UN General Assembly Resolution 71/248.
5. Increase efforts to convince Russia to direct its efforts to fighting terrorism rather than supporting the Assad regime, and to stop the supply of incendiary weapons and cluster munitions to the regime.
6. Support train, advise, and assist programmes for the Iraqi armed forces to repel and defeat Daesh elements within Iraq; and more broadly, to strengthen their counterterrorism training.
7. Make additional efforts to ensure that humanitarian aid is more equally distributed across Syria. So far, aid distribution has strongly privileged areas under government control.
8. Ensure that financial pledges, including in the framework of the Supporting Syria and the Region conference, are fully respected.
9. When adopting new legislation, lawmakers should pay attention to not legislate in a manner that inhibits principled humanitarian action being conducted in accordance with international humanitarian law. Humanitarian organisations, such as the International Committee of the Red Cross, are working in territories under the control of some controversial organisations, but they need to do so in order to fulfil their mandate, which is to assist and protect the victims of armed conflicts.

10. Ensure the implementation of the EU-Turkey agreement on refugees: while not ideal, it has made a difference in managing the refugee crisis and reducing the number of fatal incidents in the Mediterranean Sea.
11. Continue efforts to reinforce the security of borders, including through proper screening and vetting systems, in order to prevent infiltration by extremists while fully respecting the rights of people entering the Euro-Atlantic area and treating them with due dignity. The new European Border and Coast Guard Agency requires sufficient funding, material and human resources. Adequate resources need to be allocated to separate refugees from economic migrants, to create a capable and efficient European Border and Coast Guard Agency and to strengthen the role and competences of the European Asylum Support Office.
12. Increase assistance to small and more fragile countries bordering Syria – particularly Jordan and Lebanon – each of which has taken in millions of refugees. These countries cannot shoulder the Syrian refugee burden alone.
13. Encourage regional powers such as Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates and Qatar to do more to help lower the humanitarian burdens placed on Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey. Japan and Russia have so far resisted the notion of resettling refugees on their respective territories, but they too have responsibilities in this regard.
14. Ensure that refugees and migrants admitted into Western countries are given their complete rights under the 1951 Refugee Convention, including opportunities to integrate and to work. The West's capacity to take more refugees and migrants is not yet exhausted, but it is limited, including due to political and psychological reasons. Sensitivities of Western citizens, weary of rapid changes in their societal fabric, should be taken into account to prevent the rise of anti-establishment parties. However, refugees and migrants admitted into Western countries in accordance with asylum procedures should be given opportunities to become full-fledged members of Western societies.
15. Support the reform of the Dublin system to facilitate collective rather than strictly national approaches to problems linked with migrant and refugee surges. The Dublin system places enormous burdens on front line states; a system that more fairly shares the burden is now needed.

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