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Statement by the Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on the Prevention of Genocide and the Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on the Responsibility to Protect on the situation in Aleppo, Syrian Arab Republic

(New York, 02 December 2016) The Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on the Prevention of Genocide, Adama Dieng, and the Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on the Responsibility to Protect, Ivan Šimonović, expressed outrage at the dire situation of civilians who are trapped in the fighting in Aleppo.

“Civilians are being killed in besieged east Aleppo on a daily basis and tens of thousands of them are attempting to flee the area due to intensified ground fighting and indiscriminate attacks by Syrian Government forces and their allies. This is inhumane and should be stop immediately.” The Special Advisers expressed alarm that trapped civilians have only two deadly options to choose from: either to stay in east Aleppo and be subjected to indiscriminate bombardments and starvation, or flee and face the risk of being killed during their attempt to leave eastern Aleppo and the risk of being arrested and detained once they reach government or Kurdish-controlled areas. “There must be accountability for potential crimes committed”, the Special Advisers emphasized, “but no retaliation. That requires respect for due process of law, and not arbitrary detention, torture and extra judiciary killings.” Civilians in western Aleppo have also been subjected to indiscriminate shelling by armed groups, resulting in the death of dozens of people and the displacement of tens of thousands.

The situation of these children, women and men is desperate and cannot be tolerated. This is an emergency situation and warrants emergency action. As first measures, the Special Advisers reiterate the call for a pause in fighting and the creation of safe corridors for the delivery of humanitarian aid to those in need. They called on all parties to the conflict to abide by their obligations under international human rights and humanitarian law and refrain from targeting civilians and civilian infrastructures.

“The lives of hundreds of thousands of civilians are at stake. We cannot afford to wait any longer if we do not want to be the witnesses of what could be one of the biggest mass killing of civilians in our time. Aleppo has become the symbol of the failure of the Syrian Arab Republic and the international community to protect populations in Syria.”

The protection of the populations of Syria is the primary responsibility of the Syrian State. However, in the face of the State’s abject failure to protect its populations, the international community has the responsibility to take timely and decisive measures to protect populations in Syria. The Special Advisers reminded the United Nations Security Council and General Assembly that they have a special responsibility, in that regard.

Diplomatic, financial and military support from external actors has fanned the flames of the conflict. The Special Advisers urged all actors with influence in the conflict to use it today in order to stop fighting and save lives. “Why do Syrian civilians have to pay the price of external interests in Syria? We must act now. No one can claim that they did not know what was happening. It is time to uphold our commitment to ‘never again’.”

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