



**Statement of the Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights of Internally Displaced Persons and the
Global Protection Cluster Coordinator on North-West Syria:**

**New Attacks and Resulting Displacement Are Putting Civilians at Increased Risk; Immediate
Protection and Longer-Term Solutions Are Needed Now**

10 November 2023

The UN Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons (IDPs) together with the Global Protection Cluster Coordinator today expressed their alarm at the ongoing impacts of deadly airstrikes and ground-based strikes unleashed on densely populated areas, including IDP camps, across multiple communities in Idlib and western Aleppo, in North-West Syria. Together, they call for an immediate halt to such attacks affecting civilians and civilian infrastructure. They also encourage humanitarian allies, including Member States and donors, to step up both life-saving assistance in the immediate and resiliency-building initiatives, advocacy and durable solutions over the longer term. Communities in this area of the world have suffered deep harms and shocks during 12 years of armed conflict and violence, multiple displacements and limited access to humanitarian assistance. The devastating Türkiye-Syria earthquake earlier this year resulted in the further loss of life and even deeper vulnerabilities.

Starting in early October 2023, North-West Syria has become the epicenter of intensified attacks, involving Government of Syria forces and other parties to the conflict. The consequences of this surge in hostilities have been widespread, affecting more than 91 communities in southern Idlib and western Aleppo. As of 20 October, based on verified cases, there were at least 70 civilians, including 25 women, 4 girls, 12 boys and 19 men, killed in North-West Syria due to the escalation in hostilities. Further, an estimated 123,000 people have been newly displaced to 181 communities across Idlib and western Aleppo. The attacks also damaged critical civilian infrastructure, including 23 health facilities and hospitals and 17 schools. These incidents account for the deadliest attacks in months. The increased presence of explosive ordnance will likely further increase the number of casualties and people injured going forward, particularly those who are subjected to recurrent displacements; the majority of whom are women and children.

The dynamics of such attacks and their impact on civilians and livelihoods show a sinister resemblance with patterns widely documented and condemned during previous stages of the conflict in Syria, indicating that serious violations of international humanitarian law norms on the protection of civilians and civilian objects and international human rights law may have been committed.

Amidst worsening humanitarian crises unfolding in the region, these attacks and their consequences have received limited public attention. Protection actors and humanitarian partners are responding as best they can with constrained access and support. Protection partners are providing safe transportation and cash to help families relocate to safer areas, psycho-social services, family reunification supports, identifying and supporting unaccompanied and separated children, and operating community centers

that offer a range of protection services. However, several humanitarian and aid workers have themselves been killed or injured as a result of the ongoing hostilities, with such insecurity further hindering the safe delivery of urgent life-saving aid.

Beyond this critical but limited emergency response phase, more is needed to ensure displaced and crisis-affected populations across North-West Syria are protected and not exposed to deadly and indiscriminate attacks. Tangible action on the part of the Government of Syria and other parties to the conflict to cease all attacks and violence that impact civilians and to enable access to rights is absolutely critical. Until this is realized, people in North-West Syria, many of whom have been displaced multiple times and have had all assets and coping capacities eroded over the past years, will continue to experience profound risks and ongoing humanitarian needs, including as a result of barriers to accessing identity documents, to formally registering housing, land and property and to moving freely and accessing the basic services they need. Parties to the conflict must ensure that conditions for safe, voluntary and dignified return are in place and those displaced are not denied return, subjected to arbitrary arrest or prevented from accessing their homes upon return.

Member States must also scale up efforts to ensure parties to the conflict respect international humanitarian law as well as international human rights law and ensure the protection of civilians, using all available diplomatic channels, engagement and accountability efforts. We also call on donors to ensure funding for humanitarian and protection efforts is sustainable and highly flexible, enabling local and international partners to quickly adjust priorities and approaches as the operating contexts continues to change and protection risks and vulnerabilities remain highly fluid. Let us stand together with affected communities in North-West Syria and ensure their protection from violence and harm.

This statement is co-signed by:

Ms. Paula Gaviria Betancur, [Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons](#)

Mr. Samuel Cheung, [Global Protection Cluster](#) Coordinator