



MONWHO 2016: NCDs
SYRIA

Delegate Name: Victor Gassmann

Syria's ongoing civil war has fractured the country into five conflicting groups: the Islamic State, the Kurds, the Syrian government led by Bashar al Assad, the Rebels and the Al Nosra Front. The illegitimate government of Syria has control over only a fraction of its national territory, and the civil war has destroyed Syria's healthcare system. The different parties of the conflict, including the Syrian government, are responsible for the bombing of the Syrian population, the use of chemical weapons, the attack of health facilities and the kidnapping and torture of thousands of people. The constant violence has forced more than four million people to flee the country and to live in extreme conditions in refugee camps across the world, especially in Lebanon. SAMS has estimated that at least 200,000 people have died due to Non-Communicable diseases since the beginning of the conflict¹. The different armed groups and the illegitimate government of Syria are therefore seen as opponents rather than partners of the World Health Organization in the treatment of Non-communicable diseases.

The healthcare system in Syria has been completely destroyed by the civil war. Notably, there were 112 attacks on healthcare facilities in 2015². Since the beginning of the conflict, almost 700 healthcare professionals have been killed in 336 attacks². In Aleppo, more than two thirds of hospitals are no longer functioning and roughly 95% of doctors have either fled or been detained or killed². In the whole country, more than half of the country's health care facilities are either closed or partially functioning². In order to develop an adequate response to the ongoing crisis, the WHO is the leading organisation of the Whole of Syria Health sector, based in Damascus, Amman and Gaziantep. The WoS approach aims to improve the coordination of humanitarian actors in Syria, Jordan and Turkey in an attempt to ensure that aid is delivered with minimum overlap and a timely manner. A strong partnership with more than 80 organisations³, from other UN agencies and health authorities to NGO's and local community leaders is necessary in order to provide health services to hard-to-reach areas.

The present situation of NCD's in Syria is catastrophic and continues to worsen day by day. The burden of disease of the country demonstrates that 46% of deaths in the country is caused by NCDs such as cardiovascular diseases, cancer or respiratory diseases⁴. 48% of deaths are caused by conflict-related injuries⁴. The probability of dying between ages 30

and 70 from the 4 main NCD's is 19%⁴. According to UNICEF, approximately 3.2 Million U5 children in Syria are at risk of malnutrition². Almost two-thirds of the population has no access to safe water, increasing the risk of waterborne diseases². Finally, mental health is particularly worrying. Before the conflict, only three hospitals in Syria offered mental health services, with a total of 70 psychiatrists for 21 Million people⁵. Furthermore, a persistent stigma concerning mental health led to low utilization rates of mental health services. War has greatly enhanced the need for mental health services, and even if the WHO has already taken steps to train 750 health professionals, the stigma remains and a very large part of the population is in urgent need of psychological support². As stated before, Syria is almost entirely dependent on NGOs, the WHO and the UN to tackle these problems, as the state does not provide basic health services to its population.

To conclude, as the WHO ambassador in Syria, I would like to insist on the desperate need for international aid in order to tackle the Syrian health crisis, especially for NCDs. Four main issues require immediate attention: trauma care, mental health, nutrition and access to safe water. Tackling these issues will require substantial funds in order to rebuild Syria's health care system, as well as penetrating hard-to-reach and besieged areas. As there is no end in sight for this conflict, the population is particularly dependent on the WHO and other international institutions.

¹ SAMS (2016) "The impact of the Syrian Crisis on the Public Healthcare System" Retrieved: <https://www.sams-usa.net/society/index.php/news-reports/newsletters/10-sams-news/41-the-impact-of-the-syrian-crisis-on-the-public-healthcare-system>

² WHO (2015) WHO Annual Report 2015. *World Health Organization*. Retrieved: http://www.who.int/hac/crises/syr/sitreps/syria_annual_report_2015.pdf?ua=1

³ Humanitarian response (2016). "Whole of Syria Health Sector/Cluster". Retrieved: https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/fr/system/files/documents/files/wos_health_newsletter_v1_august_1.pdf

⁴ WHO (2014) "Syrian Arab Republic NCD profile". *World Health Organization*. Retrieved: http://www.who.int/nmh/countries/syr_en.pdf?ua=1

⁵ WHO (2016) "Mental Health Care in Syria: Another Casualty of War". *World Health Organization*. Retrieved: <http://www.emro.who.int/syr/syria-news/mental-health-care-in-syria-another-casualty-of-war.html>