WFP SYRIA[1]
SPECIAL OPERATION SO 200950

Country:	Syrian Arab Republic
Type of project:	Special Operation
Title:	WFP Air Deliveries to Provide Humanitarian Support to Besieged and Hard to Reach Areas in Syria
Total cost (US$):	**$18,154,268**
Duration:	3 months (20 February to 19 May 2016)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Syria conflict has further intensified and worsened the already dire humanitarian situation. Five years of conflict have resulted in large-scale population displacement with more than half of Syria's population forced to leave their homes. An estimated 13.5 million people, including 6 million children, require various forms of humanitarian assistance. Since the start of 2016, well over 160,000 people have been displaced – many have faced multiple forced displacements, often fleeing with only the clothes on their backs.

Of particular concern is the plight of 4.5 million people - over a third of the population in need – who are estimated to live in besieged and hard-to-reach areas of the country, and are cut off from regular humanitarian assistance. Of these, 2.5 million people are facing severe hunger, including over 487,000 people in 18 besieged locations. The highest concentration of people under siege is in Rural Damascus, followed by Deir Ezzor. Almost the entire population in these areas are at grave risk of starvation as extremely limited access for commercial or humanitarian supplies has led to widespread food shortages and increased hunger. Recent deaths in Madaya, caused by hunger and starvation, show a desperate situation in which besieged communities have resorted to detrimental measures to survive. Markets in most of these areas are not functioning or have been severely disrupted, leaving a highly vulnerable population without access to basic supplies.

Humanitarian access remains a significant challenge. While the UN Security Council Resolutions (UNSCR) 2139, 2165, 2191 and 2258 have greatly facilitated humanitarian access through cross-border operations, reaching people in besieged areas has been severely constrained by various parties to the conflict. The statement made by the International Syria Support Group (ISSG) on 12 February 2016 gives renewed impetus for a nationwide cessation of hostilities. It calls for accelerated and expanded the delivery of humanitarian aid to the besieged areas of Deir Ezzor, Kafr Batna, Madaya, Foah, Kufraya and Moadamiya, as a first step, to be followed by deliveries to all the other locations identified as besieged or hard-to-reach, to mitigate further starvation and widespread humanitarian crisis.

1 The project will cover for the operational costs incurred in WFP Aviation and WFP Jordan.

Subsequently, the Government of Syria gave approval to deliver humanitarian aid to seven besieged locations: Moadamiya, Madaya, Foah, Kufraya, Kafr Batna, and Deir Ezzor. Deliveries to locations accessible by land commenced on 17 February 2016 and are ongoing. However, access to Deir Ezzor city by road remains difficult because the entire city is besieged by ISIS. Evidence shows that ISIS has refused to allow humanitarian actors safe access to deliver and distribute humanitarian aid in accordance with humanitarian principles.

Recognizing the urgent needs and having agreed with relevant stakeholders that airdrops are the only viable option, WFP in its capacity as the global lead of the Logistics Cluster, is launching a special operation to conduct high-altitude parachute airdrops into Deir Ezzor city. The project is planned for an initial duration of three months at a total estimated cost of US$18,154,268.

PROJECT BACKGROUND

1. Five years of conflict in Syria have resulted in large-scale population displacement, economic recession, damage to vital infrastructure, and an increase in the population's vulnerabilities and poverty levels. This, in turn, has eroded the development of sustainable livelihoods, causing costly losses for both current and future generations. One third of the Syrian population lives in poverty and over half of the working age population is now unemployed.

2. More than half of Syria's population has been forced to leave their homes - 11 million, one of the largest population displacement since World War II. Of these, 6.5 million people are now internally displaced within Syria, while 4.6 million are registered refugees in neighbouring countries and North Africa. Sustained displacement, a mounting economic crisis and inadequacy of basic services have progressively eroded available resources and shrunk households' resilience capacity. According to the 2016 Humanitarian Needs Overview, 13.5 million people in Syria are in need of humanitarian assistance. Of these, 8.7 million people, or half of the Syrian population, are either acutely food insecure or at risk of becoming food insecure, requiring sustained humanitarian assistance.

3. The humanitarian community estimates that approximately 4.5 million people live in besieged and hard-to-reach areas of the country, and are cut off from regular humanitarian assistance. In these areas, estimates suggest that more than half the population, 2.5 million people, are facing severe hunger, including over 487,000 people in 18 besieged locations. The highest concentration of people under siege is in Rural Damascus, followed by Deir Ezzor city. Almost the entire population in these areas are at grave risk of starvation should the siege persist.

4. Numerous reports of deaths caused by starvation have surfaced in some areas under siege. Restricted access for commercial or humanitarian supplies has led to widespread food shortages and lack of access to the most basic social amenities including medical care. People have less diversified diets and some families are surviving on only bread and water or wild plants while others eat only once a day, prioritizing limited food for children. Where markets are functioning, only few food items like bread, rice, sugar, tea and vegetable oil are available in limited

quantities at very high prices, rendering them unaffordable for families under siege.

5. Following an International Syria Support Group (ISSG) meeting in Munich on 12 February 2016, a statement was issued highlighting the priority of accelerating the deliveries of urgent humanitarian aid by air to Deir Ezzor city and simultaneously by road to Foah, Kufraya, the besieged areas of Rural Damascus, Madaya, Moadamiya, and Kafr Batna. This is to be followed by deliveries to all other locations identified as besieged or hard-to-reach throughout the country. Accordingly, this has resulted in improved humanitarian access and overland deliveries commenced in the week following the Statement. However, land access to Deir Ezzor city remains impossible.

6. Given the unanimous agreement on the urgency of the humanitarian situation, the ISSG convened a humanitarian taskforce of ISSG members and countries with influence to ensure that humanitarian access is granted to all territories of Syria without exception. Moreover, ISSG members will work with Syrian parties to ensure immediate approval of all pending UN access requests.

7. Air access is the only viable means of reaching besieged populations in Deir Ezzor city. Therefore, WFP has developed this Special Operation to facilitate airdrops in support of the humanitarian community's efforts to deliver humanitarian aid to Deir Ezzor city. Under the framework of the existing Special Operation (200788), inter-agency road convoys will remain the preferred and most effective modality to deliver assistance to all other besieged and hard-to-reach areas. When and if conditions allow, deliveries by road will be resumed to Deir Ezzor city.

PROJECT JUSTIFICATION

8. Land access is not an option for areas currently besieged by those not party to the planned cessation of hostilities, rendering Deir Ezzor city reachable only by air. The south-eastern governorate of Deir Ezzor is largely under ISIS control and has been cut off from WFP reach since May 2014, whereas Deir Ezzor city has not been reached since March 2014. While ISIS controls most parts of this governorate, the airport and five neighbourhoods of the city are under the control of the Syrian government.

9. Since the beginning of 2015, ISIS forces have been imposing a strict siege on these areas, currently home to an estimated 150,000 – 200,000 people. The border between ISIS controlled areas and the besieged locations is controlled by a heavy presence of armed groups and all movements of people and goods are severely restricted. The siege is resulting in critical food shortages, while the limited available items are sold at prohibitive prices, beyond the reach of poor and vulnerable households. The price of a standard food basket is now SYP 240,000 (US$ 615), 16 times higher compared to pre-siege levels, and as such unaffordable for affected families. As a result, the entire besieged population in the city is severely food insecure and needs urgent humanitarian support.

10. Since mid-2015, WFP has been attempting to facilitate emergency airlifts to deliver life-saving food and non-food supplies to the besieged population in Deir Ezzor city. However, in spite of obtaining all necessary approvals to set up the emergency air-bridge in June, insecurity and fighting in close proximity of the airport forced WFP to put on hold plans to conduct the planned flight rotations. The situation has further worsened since September 2015, when intensified attacks and shelling carried out by ISIS inflicted significant damage to the runways, rendering them impracticable for large aircraft. At present, military helicopters can reach the governorate with limited supplies but face significant risks of attacks from the ground. In light of these considerations, airdrops are deemed the only viable option to reach the city and respond to a rapidly deteriorating humanitarian crisis.

PROJECT OBJECTIVE

11. The objective of this special operation is to create capacity for the humanitarian community to deliver life-saving humanitarian assistance to the besieged population of Deir Ezzor. This capacity would be available to all humanitarian partners.

PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION

12. As a result of the prolonged siege, the humanitarian needs in Deir Ezzor city are increasing and getting more urgent by the day. The airdrop capacity will also be made available to humanitarian partners on a no-cost-recovery basis to ensure delivery of all supplies. Prioritization of cargo will be based on humanitarian needs as determined by the Humanitarian Country Team.

13. One Ilyushin (IL-76) cargo aircraft, capable of conducting high altitude airdrops of up to 26 MT of palletised relief items will be positioned in the region to conduct one to two airdrops per day over Deir Ezzor for an initial period of three months, subject to prevailing security situations and available resources.

14. The aircraft will operate out of Amman, Jordan or Damascus, Syria. The high altitude parachute drops will help minimize security risks to the aircraft and crew, while ongoing coordination with relevant local authorities and other stakeholders will be carried out to ensure an acceptable level of security risk.

15. Special equipment, including platforms and parachuting systems, are prerequisites for high altitude airdrops and will be positioned at the operational base as appropriate. Certified specialists from the operator will also be deployed for cargo platform building and for supervising aircraft loading. Moreover, sensitization and necessary training will be provided to the ground teams that will receive the cargo.

16. Given the constantly changing security situation on the ground, the delivery and implementation plan will be continuously monitored and revised as necessary to meet the objective of this special operation.

17. Recognizing that airdrops do not constitute a sustainable and scalable response in the long term, opportunities to access Deir Ezzor city via land will continue to be assessed.

PROJECT MANAGEMENT

18. The WFP Syria Country Director will be the Funds Manager for this special operation and the WFP Syria Head of Finance will be the Allotment Manager.

19. The WFP Syria Head of Logistics will be the overall Project Manager for this special operation and responsible for project implementation in coordination with the WFP Aviation Service in Headquarters.

20. Qualified WFP Aviation staff will be deployed to manage the air operation from Amman and Damascus in coordination with the WFP Syria Country Office team. Additional Logistics Cluster staff will support for cargo prioritization, information management and cargo tracking.

21. The WFP Syria Deputy Country Director and programme team will be responsible for the overall programmatic aspects of the delivery in coordination with cooperating partners. The special operation is implemented within the framework of EMOP 200339 BR16, "Emergency Food Assistance to the People Affected by Unrest in Syria", and will consequently use the various mechanisms and risk mitigation measures developed within the context of the regular project activities.

RISK ANALYSIS AND PREPAREDNESS PLANNING

22. Programmatic risks: There is an inherent programmatic risk in ensuring successful delivery of humanitarian relief in complex emergencies. This is particularly the case in besieged areas where monitoring is inherently difficult. The main risks are aid diversion and non-adherence to humanitarian principles. Due to the sensitivity of this operation, WFP has put in place special measures to mitigate the identified risks, including close coordination between all stakeholders, rapid distribution of received cargo, enhanced remote monitoring, remote training of partner staff, and daily distribution reports, including photographic reporting of distributions. These daily reports should confirm that 100% of the cargo has been received before subsequent deliveries are made. Any deviation from the plans agreed to with the relevant authorities and partners will lead to a suspension of activities.

23. Contextual risks: The security situation constitutes the main risk to the implementation of the project. As ISIS is not a party to the planned cessation of hostilities, as outlined in the ISSG Statement, substantial threat to aircraft and other property remains a priority concern as ISIS has proven ground to air attack capability. Consequently, high altitude parachute drops would be utilised rather than low-level loose cargo airdrops in order to minimise the risk to the aircraft and crew. Furthermore, conducting regular airdrops for three months using the same flight path and establishing predictable patterns would greatly increase the risk of

attack from the ground. Moreover, due to the high altitude of these airdrops, there is a risk that the cargo will land in ISIS controlled areas. This system average (as reported by actual operator utilisation) has been 100% accurate, but residual risk remains, including wind changes or lack of accurate information from meteorological services. The residual risk is mitigated in two stages: the limited amount of supplies in each rotation (maximum 26 MT, roughly equivalent to one truckload), and immediate suspension of activities if the basic operational criteria under which the operation is being undertaken is not sustainably met. WFP will review daily with the partners on the ground as well as with the aircraft operator the performance of the day in order to ensure ever greater effectiveness.

24. Institutional risks: The main risks are potential funding challenges and reputational risks to WFP and other humanitarian partners. Sufficient funding of the operation will ensure that the full envisaged humanitarian assistance is provided and will furthermore assure beneficiaries and partners that needs will be met. WFP and other UN agencies in Syria have been exposed to negative media portrayal in recent months and therefore the reputational risks are substantial. Conducting airdrops into Deir Ezzor city, a government held area, may imply support to the priorities of the Government of Syria. Moreover, any aid diversion or missed landing of cargo can present a reputational risk to WFP. A strong communication strategy will be developed to address the identified risks, highlight the objectives and challenges of the operation as well as stress the efforts to reach all besieged and hard-to-reach areas in a principled manner.

PROJECT COSTS AND BENEFITS

25. The special operation has a total cost of US$18,154,268 and is expected to provide the necessary life-saving assistance to affected populations otherwise cut-off from humanitarian assistance inside Syria.

26. Subject to the prevailing security condition, and availability of air assets and related equipment to conduct the airdrops, this project aims to enable the delivery of up to 2,000 MT of food and other humanitarian supplies to Deir Ezzor subject to operational constraints.

MONITORING & EVALUATION

27. The achievements of the special operation will be monitored and evaluated based on the key performance indicators (KPI) below:
    - Quantity (MT) of relief items delivered vs. planned figure
    - Percentage of cargo delivered within promised lead-time
    - Percentage of airdrops conducted vs. requested

28. Programme monitoring will be carried out within the overall framework of EMOP 200339 BR16, “Emergency Food Assistance to the People Affected by Unrest in Syria”, and complemented by the special measures on remote monitoring that include data from a variety of sources including local councils, affected populations and key sources within the community.

RECOMMENDATION

This Special Operation covering the period from 20 February 2016 to 19 May 2016 at a total cost to WFP of **US$18,154,268** is recommended for approval by the Executive Director with the budget provided.

APPROVAL

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Ertharin Cousin
Executive Director