PRESS RELEASE

ON WORLD HUMANITARIAN DAY, JOINT UN AND OIC VISIT TO AFGHANISTAN KICKS OFF

Kabul, 19 August 2016 – At the start of a three-day visit to Afghanistan, high-level officials from the United Nations and the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation today commemorated World Humanitarian Day in Kabul urging increased international partnerships to address the root causes of humanitarian needs, reduce communities' vulnerability to disasters and raise awareness of Afghanistan's protracted humanitarian crisis.

Civilians in Afghanistan continue to bear the brunt of a conflict which has grown in intensity and geographic scope, affecting the lives of at least 6.3 million Afghans. Over 210,000 people have been newly internally displaced by conflict in 2016 alone – some 1,000 people per day. The continued conflict and displacement create recurring humanitarian emergencies which place further strain on already overstretched and insufficient basic services. Afghanistan has the world's second highest mortality rate for children under five and almost 3 million people are affected by malnutrition. The deteriorating security situation severely hampers the delivery of health services and the displaced people are highly vulnerable to both diseases and malnutrition. In addition, natural disasters such as floods, earthquakes, landslides and droughts impact on an estimated 235,000 people every year.

"Nearly a third of the people of Afghanistan are in need of humanitarian aid and this continues year after year. It is critical that the UN works to reinforce the humanitarian partnerships that can support and enhance the response to people's immediate and longer term needs," said Rashid Khalikov, UN Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Partnerships with the Middle East and Central Asia.

The escalating conflict is having a devastating impact on Afghan civilians with increasing civilian casualties, conflict-induced displacement, lack of protection and violations of International Humanitarian Law. A 2016 mid-year UN report records a total number of 5,166 civilian casualties, the largest since 2009, one third of whom were children. The total number of civilian casualties since 2009 amounts to 63,934.

Ambassador Hesham Youssef, Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs in the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, said: "It is evident to us that much more effort is needed to address the deteriorating situation in Afghanistan. This is why the OIC is exerting extensive efforts to address the escalating conflict. We also hope to be able to benefit from this mission in raising awareness of the humanitarian situation in Afghanistan at the

international level and in our Member States with the objective of increasing their assistance and investment in sustainable development solutions for the people of Afghanistan."

The Chairman of the OIC Humanitarian Funds' Board of Trustees, Sheikh Abdul Aziz al-Thani, said: "With this visit marking World Humanitarian Day, and as needs continue to grow, we are looking into how the OIC Humanitarian Fund for Afghanistan can build on 15 years of presence to mobilise greater and more predictable funding for humanitarian programmes."

The United Nations Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator, Mark Bowden said: "Afghanistan remains as one of the world's most protracted crises that has led to massive levels of internal displacement. Each year sees more families uprooted by conflict many of whom remain displaced and at the margins of survival. In this, the first World Humanitarian day following the World Humanitarian Summit, we must make more determined efforts to live up to international commitments made in Istanbul "to leave no one behind", and better address the needs of displaced people and the victims of conflict to ensure that they are not excluded from Afghanistan's development".

It is critical that Afghanistan invests in sustainable development solutions to reduce the cycles of humanitarian needs. This will require a sustainable and effective health care system; durable solutions for the internally displaced and returning refugees; effective water management to reduce flooding and droughts; and the development of an effective disaster management system including early warning mechanisms.

The current humanitarian situation is already severe and needs are increasing. The 2016 Humanitarian Response Plan, aiming to help 3.5 million people in need, is tightly focused on the most acute life-saving response to displaced people and on life-saving interventions in health and nutrition. As of 30 June, 61 per cent - US$207 million - of the $339 million mid-year revised request have been received. Every effort must be made to increase current levels of international humanitarian aid and at the same time invest in long-term, sustainable development solutions to address the recurrent humanitarian needs and strengthen community resilience.

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