**Save the Children: Astana Syria talks happening in a ‘parallel reality’ as children continue to live under bombing and siege**

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As parties to the conflict in Syria meet in Astana, Kazakhstan today [Monday], Save the Children is warning that hundreds of thousands of children are still trapped and being bombed and denied aid in besieged and hard-to-reach areas. More than two weeks after the start of a partial truce, there has been an appalling lack of progress on aid deliveries, underlining the risk that these talks will focus on narrow military and political gains at the expense of helping the most vulnerable.

Last week [Thursday], the UN said January has been one of the worst months for obstruction of aid deliveries, and convoys only reached one of the 15 besieged areas. And although there is supposedly a partial ceasefire in place, civilians come under the continued fire of airstrikes, snipers and shelling.

The town of Madaya, where an estimated 20,000 children are under siege without aid, has been under increased and intense shelling. Idlib governorate in the north, where 750,000 displaced people are now sheltering, saw 72 security incidents in the first two weeks of January alone, including at least 46 airstrikes.

Rula\*, a teacher in Madaya, told Save the Children of almost constant shelling and artillery fire in recent days: “My neighbour’s house was hit by the shelling. A mother had to give birth while the shelling was going on, but the baby was stillborn. They said they will bring aid, but it has been two months and we’ve had nothing.”

Sonia Khush, Save the Children’s Syria Director, said: “While powerful global players talk in Astana today, children are cowering from continued bombardment and going to bed hungry at night. These talks risk happening in a parallel universe.”

“After years of failed negotiations and broken promises, this has to be more than a talking shop for competing sides to cynically advance their own interests. They must work together in the interests of Syria’s next generation, the one that will have to rebuild the country one day. While it’s important to explore every avenue possible to secure a lasting ceasefire in Syria, it’s critical that the voices and needs of children are properly represented at these talks - aid deliveries and protection of civilians must be top of the agenda.”

Save the Children, which works directly and through partners inside Syria, is calling for a comprehensive and lasting ceasefire, which ends the use of deadly explosive weapons in populated areas and makes provision for immediate aid access to all besieged and hard to reach areas.