30 September 2016 | GENEVA – The World Health Organization (WHO) is calling on belligerents in Syria to allow for the immediate and safe evacuation of the sick and wounded from all areas affected by the conflict, including eastern Aleppo. The Organization is also calling for a halt of attacks on health care workers and facilities.

"The situation is heart rending and enraging," says WHO Director-General Margaret Chan. "With the relentless attacks on health workers and hospitals, the handful of doctors still alive cannot possibly cope. Hospital beds are too few, equipment has been destroyed, and essential medicines, including anaesthetics, are running out. Many patients needing emergency trauma care are children. "

More than 270 000 people are trapped in east Aleppo with dwindling supplies of food, water and fuel. Humanitarian organizations have not been allowed to deliver aid, including medical supplies fromÂÂÂ WHOÂÂÂ since the besiegement of the city on 7 July. Within the past week, over 840 people have been injured, almost a third of them children, while the health facilities that would treat them are crumbling and understaffed. ÂÂÂ Fewer than 30 doctors remain in the east of the city, and only 6 partially-functional hospitals are in service.
WHO is calling on all parties in the conflict to:

• allow the immediate evacuation of the sick and wounded from all areas affected by the conflict, including eastern Aleppo;
• allow access to provide medicines, medical supplies, fuel and health personnel, to support overwhelmed staff in Aleppo;
• immediately halt all attacks on health workers, facilities and supplies;
• respect the safety and neutrality of health workers and health facilities;
• cease removal of critical supplies from deliveries of medical supplies.

"Attacking health care is both illegal and barbaric," says Dr Pete Salama, Executive Director of WHO's health emergencies programme. "Blocking whole populations from access to medical care, food and water is intolerable. It is inexcusable cruelty."

WHO and partners have positioned medical supplies for delivery into eastern Aleppo, but they have not been granted access. The organization has also developed strategies for medical evacuations as soon as this becomes possible. In the meantime, WHO will train first responders on trauma care via telephone and video calls.