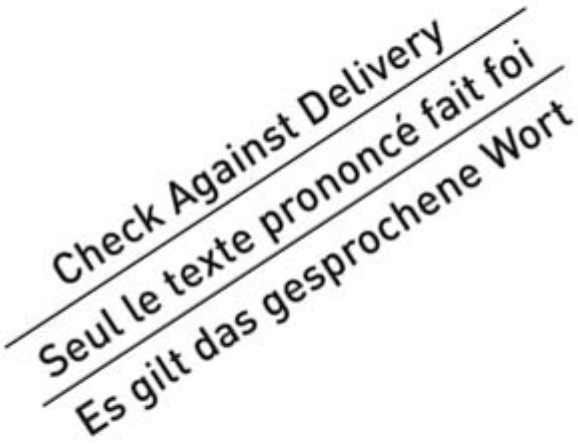
EUROPEAN COMMISSION

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The Syrian crisis – humanitarian priorities of the European Commission



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High Commissioner Guterres, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am very grateful to the Executive Committee of UNHCR for bringing us all here. Together we can face this crisis, the enormity of which has drawn a deep shadow over the whole region.

A year ago there were hopes for an imminent solution. Since then the number of people killed quadrupled, from 27,000 to over 100,000 and the number of refugees increased eight times, from 270,000 to over 2.1 million. Today the hope for a solution is yet again revived as people are looking to the international community to overcome the last year's paralysis. But even if a political solution to this conflict can be found, it will take years for the deep wounds that have been opened to heal. This is a protracted crisis. And that fact has specific implications.

In the European Union, we have long understood the severity of this crisis. So far we have mobilised €2 billion – US$2.7 billion - to help Syrians and to help their neighbours. About 40 percent of that amount has been spent on food, shelter and medicines inside Syria. I would like to pay my deepest respect for the humanitarian workers who deliver this aid and who are risking their lives doing so. Another 40 percent of the assistance goes to refugees. They are unfortunately not only putting a financial burden on neighbouring countries, but there presence also poses a potential risk to these countries. Last but not least, about 20 percent of the aid goes to host communities. If we did not help people in host communities, there could soon be a turn in the attitude they have shown, which could have devastating consequences.

Looking into the future, these are our priorities:

First, raise money, this year, next year, the year to follow. Europe has already exceeded the commitments it has made. We will continue to strive to stand by the countries in difficulty.

Second, access. I could not agree more with previous speakers who were asking for the United Nations Security Council to come up with clear conclusions on humanitarian access. This is the first time in modern history when, in the face of an overwhelming humanitarian disaster, the Security Council has not said a number of basic things, has not condemned the killing of civilians and attacks on relief workers. This is not only bad for civilians in Syria, but is also sets a dangerous precedent of complacency in the face of brutal disregard for international humanitarian law.

Third, in the countries receiving the bulk of refugees, we must continue with and reinforce the implementation of a comprehensive approach - combining macroeconomic support, development assistance and humanitarian aid. In our humanitarian programmes, we must stretch every euro, every dollar, every lira as far as possible.

Fourth, as we strive to supply life saving assistance, we must recognise that one of the biggest dangers of this crisis is radicalising youth. We must prevent the creation of a lost generation.

Last but not least, we in Europe must not only keep our hearts and wallets open, but also our borders. We should remember that the UNHCR was created for Europeans displaced by World War II. We were the refugees. The European Union is based on the value of solidarity. This also means to welcome people when they need it. We need a political solution for the Syria crisis. But in the meantime, we also need to demonstrate solidarity with people who so badly need it.

Thank you for your attention!