European Commission - Speech

# Recorded remarks by Commissioner Janez Lenarčič at the Senior Officials Meeting for the people of Syria

Brussels, 10 May 2023

Ladies and gentlemen,

**Syria remains one of the biggest humanitarian crises of our time.**

That is why it is so important this discussion is taking place today. After 12 long years of conflict, the people of Syria need our support now more than ever.

I thank State Minister Lindner for his remarks. And for Germany's important role in co-organising this much-needed event.

This is the seventh Senior Officials Meeting for the people of Syria. Participation has doubled since the first edition in 2018. However, the situation in Syria today has significantly deteriorated since we first met.

**Food insecurity** has drastically risen since last year, worsened by the illegal Russian invasion of Ukraine. Nearly 70% of Syria's population now need food assistance.

The **climate crisis** continues to threaten already vulnerable communities across the country. Prompting more frequent and extreme weather events like flooding and windstorms.

That is why **February's earthquakes are disaster upon disaster** for the people of Syria. Killing 6,000 people and displacing 350,000 more. Not counting the Syrian refugees in affected areas of Türkiye who have again had their lives turned upside down.

I am proud of the EU's response to this catastrophe. We were among the first to deliver in-kind assistance to victims via the EU Civil Protection Mechanism and the European Humanitarian Response Capacity. And mobilising 75 million euro of humanitarian assistance.

**This is European solidarity in action.**

But it is of course not enough. The international community must do more to address the challenges we face.

**First: lack of funding.** The gap between global humanitarian needs and the resources we have at our disposal continues to widen.

Last year under half of Syria's needs were funded. The lowest level of support for the Syria

Humanitarian Response Plan since 2016.

We urgently need more concrete commitments from more donors. Because supporting people in crisis is a responsibility the international community must share more equally.

**Second: politicisation of humanitarian aid.** We must achieve sustained access for all humanitarian actors. Ensuring it is possible to deliver support in a clear and neutral way wherever people are.

**Third: ensuring continued humanitarian access.** We must ensure the UN's cross-border authorisation is extended beyond July. Keeping open the channels developed after February.

And it means doing all we can to facilitate lifesaving humanitarian work inside Syria. Currently, the EU's humanitarian exemption to sanctions on the Syrian regime will expire on 24 August.

But humanitarian needs will not stop on this date. And delivery of necessary aid will become even more difficult.

We must make this exemption permanent. To ensure that our humanitarian partners can continue their vital support.

But we must do more than just tackle obstacles to support. We must go further and **build early recovery and rehabilitation in Syria.**

Humanitarian aid is vital for emergency needs. But people also need to build resilience. Because communities cannot live in tents forever. And water cannot be trucked to camps permanently.

Let me be clear: resilience building is not reconstruction. It supports those in need more efficiently and sustainably. And gives people back their dignity.

**Together, we can make a difference in Syria.**

I look forward to seeing you at the Brussels Seven meeting next month. Where we must recommit to assisting the Syrian people.

But for real change, we need real action. That is why I urge you today to build concrete and clear recommendations to be put in place during Brussels Seven.

The people of Syria are relying on us. We must not let them down.

Thank you.

SPEECH/23/2766

Press contacts:

Balazs UJVARI (+32 2 295 45 78)

General public inquiries: Europe Direct by phone 00 800 67 89 10 11 or by email