Foreign & Commonwealth Office (UK)

"The delivery of cross-border aid provides a lifeline for millions...who would be impossible to reach in a sustained manner from within Syria"

2017-12-19

Thank you Mr President.

The United Kingdom welcomes the renewal of Resolution 2165 today. For a further twelve months, Resolution 2393 will allow us to continue to deliver urgently needed humanitarian aid across conflict lines and borders to reach the people of Syria.

We thank the penholders for their work and we regret that the adoption was not unanimous. Especially since the penholders ensured over many, many weeks that they listened to concerns of all Council members and took on board proposals from many of us, including Russia.

The renewal of Resolution 2165 gives the people of Syria a small ray of hope. The delivery of cross-border aid provides a lifeline for millions of Syrians, who it would be impossible to reach in a sustained manner from within Syria.

However, we must take stock. It is three years since Resolution 2165 was first passed. Despite the intention to ease the suffering of the Syrian people, the situation for them has actually got worse. 13 million people are still in need of humanitarian assistance. And that’s 2 million more than when we adopted Resolution 2165. On top of that, an additional 2.3 million people have fled Syria. Countless others have been killed. In some areas malnutrition has increased fivefold in this year alone.

Yes, the renewal of this resolution will ensure aid will continue to reach some of the millions who depend on it. But despite this resolution, the vast majority of 420,000 people in 10 besieged areas will be denied access to aid because of blockages imposed by the regime.

94 per cent of those people are in Eastern Ghouta. Eastern Ghouta is a so-called de-escalation zone. These zones are meant to ensure a cessation of hostilities and an increase in the amount of humanitarian aid. In reality, there is little or no actual de-escalation going on in Eastern Ghouta. The de-escalation designation has been used by the regime to cut off access to life-saving medical and food aid. The regime is starving the people of Eastern Ghouta to death in contravention of International Humanitarian Law.

The situation has now reached a critical point. More than ten per cent of all children under the age of five suffer from acute malnutrition. It's the highest rate recorded since the conflict began. Medical facilities are overwhelmed. 572 people urgently need a Medivac – a medical evacuation. Including 65 who are under the age of five. 18 children are at imminent risk of death.

So once again I urge Russia to use all its influence over the regime to ensure the unimpeded delivery of humanitarian assistance and to ensure that those in urgent medical need can be evacuated. It is just a 30 minute journey from Eastern Ghouta to Damascas to receive treatment. It really is a matter of life and death.

We call on Russia to use its influence over the regime so that one more person does not die waiting for treatment. 15 is already too many. So that another child does not die for want of a 30-minute journey. Six is already too many. Those who require treatment must be allowed to leave now.

The people of Eastern Ghouta have suffered enough. Take Karim. He is a two month old baby. His mother was killed by regime artillery bombardment. He lost his eye and had his skull broken in the same attack. We must stand in solidarity with Karim. The siege must be lifted immediately.

Ultimately, the suffering of the Syrian people will only end when the conflict ends. There must be a political settlement. We must all unite to support Staffan de Mistura. The Geneva talks represent the only sustainable path to peace and all international efforts must support that process.

We commend the opposition who have maintained their commitment to direct negotiations without preconditions and have engaged constructively with the talks. The opposition's efforts presented a perfect opportunity for the last round of talks to make real progress on the substance of a political transition.

These hopes were dashed by the regime. They showed their utter contempt for the talks; they arrived late, they took a long weekend in Damascus, they refused to engage in direct negotiations with the opposition.

Mr President, the Assad regime has made aid a weapon of war. They are restricting humanitarian access to besieged populations.

Blocking aid convoys from the UN and other impartial humanitarian organisations after approving them is abominable and it must stop.

The renewal of the resolution today is a clear signal to the regime that the international community is united in our determination to ensure that aid must not be used as a weapon.

Aid must be delivered at speed, unhindered, to those who need it, full stop.

Thank you.

Source: https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/the-delivery-of-cross-border-aid-provides-a-lifeline-for-millionswho-would-be-impossible-to-reach-in-a-sustained-manner-from-within-syria