Foreign & Commonwealth Office (UK)

Her Royal Highness The Countess of Wessex, accompanied by FCO Minister, Lord (Tariq) Ahmad of Wimbledon, visits Lebanon

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Her Royal Highness The Countess of Wessex and FCO Minister and the Prime Minister's Special Representative on Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict, Lord (Tariq) Ahmad of Wimbledon, have completed a two-day visit to Lebanon.

Her Royal Highness and Lord Ahmad, accompanied by the British Ambassador to Lebanon, Chris Rampling, met Lebanon's President Michel Aoun, Speaker Nabih Berri and Prime Minister Saad Hariri to discuss the UK's close partnership with Lebanon.

The visit to the region reflected Her Royal Highness's commitment to women's empowerment, promoting tolerance, and preventing gender-based violence in conflict. The Countess of Wessex and Lord Ahmad saw how UK humanitarian assistance, and the work of charitable foundations and NGOs it supports, provides vital assistance to vulnerable Syrian refugee and Lebanese host communities in Lebanon, particularly women and children.

In Baysour, The Countess of Wessex met Syrian and Lebanese women working together to promote social stability between Syrian refugees and their Lebanese host communities.

In the Bekaa, the Countess visited an informal tented settlement and met Syrian female heads of households supported by the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) to hear of the challenges they face.

HRH and Lord Ahmad also joined a roundtable discussion attended by female Syrian civil society leaders, human rights defenders and peacebuilding experts to share ideas on what more could be done to ensure Syrian women are fully involved in building a peaceful future for Syria.

Ahead of the UK hosting the International Conference on Sexual Violence in Conflict in November, The Countess of Wessex and Lord Ahmad met civil society leaders responsible for providing critical support to survivors of sexual violence, who had been displaced to Lebanon from Syria.

Lord Ahmad said:

I am pleased to have the privilege of accompanying Her Royal Highness The Countess of Wessex on this historic visit to Lebanon. The visit reflects the importance of the UK's strong and abiding partnership with Lebanon, as well as recognising Lebanon's role in hosting the very significant number of Syrian refugees displaced to Lebanon.

Our visit also demonstrates our shared determination to do all we can to champion women's role in Syria's peace process and our commitment to strengthening international efforts to prevent and respond to sexual based violence in conflict, including in Syria. This is particularly important as the UK prepares to host the International Conference on Sexual Violence in Conflict later this year.

We look forward to continuing our close partnership with Lebanon tackling these important issues together.

BACKGROUND

As the brutal conflict continues in Syria, millions of people continue to be in need. Hundreds of thousands have been killed. In response to the crisis, the UK has committed £2.81 billion of UK aid since 2012, the UK's biggest ever humanitarian response.

Our partnership with Lebanon is a critical pillar of this response: in 2018 the Department for International Development spent £78m helping the country host approximately 1.5m Syrian refugees, the highest number of refugees per capita in the world (c. 30% of the population).

The UK has committed £2.81 billion in humanitarian assistance supporting the most vulnerable citizens in Syria and its neighbouring countries.

Rape and other forms of sexual violence have been consistently used as a weapon of war in Syria by the regime and armed groups. The UK has provided £10 million through the Conflict, Security and Stability Fund to support gender-related projects in Syria and the region since the start of the Syria crisis, including supporting organisations to raise awareness of women's rights, to treat survivors of sexual violence, and to document medical evidence for use in any future prosecutions.

We have provided over £30 million to the UN Population Fund in Syria to help reduce and mitigate gender-based violence, and provide life-saving sexual and reproductive health services.

In November 2019, the UK will host the follow-up to the 2014 Global Summit to End Sexual Violence in Conflict, continuing our global efforts to strengthen accountability and tackling the culture of impunity; addressing sensitive issues such as support for children born of rape and male, LGBT and disabled survivors; the role of media organisations and faith leaders in

tackling survivor stigma; and, working with armed forces to prevent conflict-related sexual violence.

Further information

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