Foreign & Commonwealth Office (UK)

New UK help to protect millions at risk from deadly airstrikes in North West Syria

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The UK government will help protect and assist civilians in North West Syria amid warnings that more than 2.9 million people in Idlib and surrounding areas are at risk of deadly attacks by the Asad regime and its backers.

The support announced today (Friday 17 August) by Minister for the Middle East Alistair Burt will provide emergency assistance and vital medical support for people sheltering in Idlib. This includes support for four health centres and two mobile health teams, which will travel around the area treating the most vulnerable people.

The Minister also announced that UK aid is backing an innovative new technology which provides civilians with early warnings to save lives in communities bombarded by airstrikes.

The technology, which has been developed by civilian technology company Hala Systems, works by detecting aircraft using remote sensors and machine-learning algorithms, before sending early warnings to civilians through air raid sirens and social media alerts. Thanks to UK support, it has already warned more than 2 million people and is estimated to have reduced casualties by up to 27% in areas under heavy bombardment.

The Minister added that the UK is supporting the UN and other partners on an emergency response plan ahead of an anticipated escalation in the conflict.

Speaking today, Minister for the Middle East Alistair Burt said:

The UK is extremely concerned about escalating military action by Asad and his backers on almost 3 million civilians who have sought shelter in Idlib and surrounding areas. These are people who have suffered through more than 7 years of fighting; many have already been displaced multiple times.

Today’s UK aid package will make sure the most vulnerable can get the medical treatment, food, water and support they so desperately need. But this is not enough. That’s why we’re also funding an innovative early warning system that is proven to reduce civilian casualties from airstrikes.

A humanitarian catastrophe in Idlib is avoidable. The UK supports the urgent diplomatic efforts being made by Turkey and the UN. We call on the Syrian regime and its backers, Russia and Iran, to uphold the ceasefire they have agreed, and to respect international humanitarian law. They should also be clear: we will respond appropriately if the Asad regime repeats its appalling use of chemical weapons.

The North West of Syria has become a refuge for around 1.9 million displaced people that have fled fighting throughout the country, bringing the region's total population to around 4 million, 2.9 million of whom are living in Idlib and surrounding areas.

There have already been at least 37 attacks on health facilities in the Idlib region so far this year and civilians, aid workers and medical staff fear for their safety.

The influx of civilians has stretched scarce resources in the region and tens of thousands are living in tents in crowded camps, with demand for humanitarian assistance being greater than ever before.

Today's UK aid package will also:

support four health centres and two mobile health clinics in Idlib by providing doctors, nurses, midwives, medicine and medical equipment to treat people fleeing fighting;

provide psychological support to protect women and children suffering from trauma, distress and other mental health conditions;

provide 3200 dignity kits for women and 5000 kits for children in Idlib;

provide support staff to ensure the most vulnerable people can access essential services and are legally protected, including by helping them access civil documents such as birth and marriage certificates; and

provide one-off cash transfers to the most vulnerable families fleeing into Idlib so that they can essentials such as food, water and fuel for heat.

The brutal Syrian civil war, now in its eighth year, has already cost an estimated 400,000 lives, with over 11 million people displaced by conflict and causing a severe shortage of food, clean water and healthcare.

Britain has been at the forefront of the response to the Syria crisis and already we have delivered 27 million monthly food rations, 10 million relief packages, 10 million vaccines against deadly diseases and 12 million medical consultations for those in need in Syria.

Notes to editors

Today’s package of UK aid support for North West Syria is part of a wider £10 million new allocation for the UK’s response to the Syria crisis. For security reasons, we cannot name all of our partners delivering aid in Syria.

Through the Conflict, Stability and Security Fund, alongside our international partners, the UK has supported Hala Systems, a social enterprise focused on developing innovative technical solutions aimed at helping protect civilian communities caught in conflict, including in Syria.

The UK is a leading donor in the humanitarian response. To date we have committed over £2.71 billion in humanitarian funding to the region.

For more information on the UK’s humanitarian response to the Syria crisis, visit: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/factsheet-the-uks-humanitarian-aid-response-to-the-syria-crisis

Alistair Burt is a Minister of State at both the Department for International Development (DFID) and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO).

Source: https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-uk-help-to-protect-millions-at-risk-from-deadly-airstrikes-in-north-west-syria