Syria: UN Contact Group at Farnesina – Bonino: Humanitarian catastrophe, aid access and civilian security

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Syria is experiencing the “worst humanitarian crisis of our times” and it is the “shame of the international community” that aid is being kept out of the region. Minister Bonino’s harsh words were spoken from Rome, where the UN held a meeting of 19 countries to make a univocal appeal for access to food, water and medical aid for millions of people in urgent need. The minister called for “the defence of civilians and a stop to the bombardment of those standing on line for bread, and on schools and hospitals”.

We can no longer accept what is happening

“We can no longer accept what is happening”, warned the minister in her opening speech to the High Level Group on the Humanitarian Challenges in Syria, flanked by UN Under-Secretary General Valerie Amos and European Commissioner on Humanitarian Affairs Kristalina Georgieva. The meeting was dedicated to outlining “practical solutions, even if they are limited”. The toll, after nearly 3 years, is over 130,000 dead and 7 million persons in dire need of aid. The funds have earmarked, and aid stands ready at the border, it “just needs the go ahead”, but thus far the parties “have ignored the appeals”, the minister asserted. The EU alone has earmarked 3.5 billion dollars, “but it will be of little use if the aid cannot get in”, Georgieva pointed out.

11 immediate interventions approved in Rome

A total of 11 immediate interventions were approved in Rome with the short-term goals of ensuring access to the besieged communities, the demilitarisation of schools and hospitals and of raising new aid funds, Valerie Amos announced, expressing the hope that the parties to the conflict accept the international community’s proposals. But even as she, Bonino and Georgieva launched a new appeal today for the defence of civilians, the anti-regime forces denounced new air bombing raids on Aleppo.

Amos to present results of the work group to UN Security Council on 13 February

Amos is to present the results of today’s meeting to the UN Security Council on 13 February, while on 10 February the second round of Geneva 2 talks begins, but “the political dialogue

must be kept separate from the humanitarian emergency", Bonino stressed, because at the present moment the priority is to "alleviate the suffering of millions of people". The humanitarian crisis also involves the neighbouring countries of Jordan, Turkey and Lebanon as a result of the massive flow of refugees; one million alone have fled to Lebanon, one-fourth of that country's population: "it's as if 15 million people had suddenly arrived in Italy", Bonino explained, who leaves on Wednesday for Beirut to observe the situation for herself.

Italian Cooperation response

The numbers of the Syrian crisis are astounding. According to OCHA estimates, there are 9.3 million people in need of humanitarian assistance in Syria; Syrian refugees and those awaiting registration, according to the UNHCR, amount to 2.3 million.

To date, Italy's contribution to confronting the Syrian emergency amounts to 26.6 million euro, with interventions on behalf of the displaced and support for the efforts of the neighbouring countries of Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey and Iraq that have accepted refugees. Broken down, 42.32% of this aid has gone to Lebanon, followed by Syria (28.28%), Jordan (18.96%), Turkey (7.58%) and Iraq (2.86%); intervention types can be broken down into 53.42% to international organisations, of 38.25% to bilateral cooperation and the remaining 8.32% to financing transport from the Brindisi humanitarian aid depot.The Italian Cooperation has implemented interventions valued at 19 million euro in support of the governments of neighbouring Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey and Iraq, and consist of emergency medical assistance, food aid, psycho-social assistance for children, technical assistance and community coordination. The Italian Cooperation interventions have been focused on healthcare, hygiene and the environment and carried out in concert with international organisations (UNHCR, WHO), foreign NGOs (IMO, Turkish Red Crescent) and Italian NGOs (Oxfam Italia, Cisp, GVC, Avsi and Intersos). Support in Syria itself, has consisted of 7.5 million euro earmarked for a vast range of operations in the areas of emergency medical, food security/nutritional and psycho-social assistance (in coordination with UNMAS), humanitarian coordination, and multi-sector healthcare and agricultural operations.

Source :
https://www.esteri.it/en/sala_stampa/archivionotizie/approfondimenti/2014/01/20140131_gruppo_alto_livello/