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30. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Commission and the Council.

P7_TA(2013)0223

Situation of Syrian refugees in neighbouring countries

European Parliament resolution of 23 May 2013 on the situation of Syrian refugees in neighbouring countries (2013/2611(RSP))

(2016/C 055/12)

The European Parliament,

— having regard to its previous resolutions on Syria, in particular those of 16 February 2012 ([1]) and 13 September 2012 ([2]), and on refugees fleeing armed conflict,

— having regard to the Foreign Affairs Council conclusions on Syria of 23 March, 23 April, 14 May, 25 June, 23 July, 15 October, 19 November and 10 December 2012, and of 23 January, 18 February, 11 March, and 22 April 2013; having regard to the Justice and Home Affairs Council of October 2012, which endorsed the establishment of a regional protection programme by the Commission; having regard to the European Council conclusions on Syria of 2 March, 29 June and 14 December 2012, and of 8 February 2013,

— having regard to the statements by the Vice-President of the Commission/High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (VP/HR), Catherine Ashton, on Syrian refugees, in particular her remarks during the plenary debate in Strasbourg on 13 March 2013 and her statement of 8 May 2013; having regard to the statements made by the Commissioner for International Cooperation, Humanitarian Aid and Crisis Response, Kristalina Georgieva, on Syrian refugees and the EU's response, in particular her statement of 12 May 2013, and to the ECHO (Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection) situation reports and factsheets on Syria,

— having regard to United Nations Security Council resolutions 2059 of 20 July 2012, 2043 of 21 April 2012 and 2042 of 14 April 2012, and to the updated report of the UN Independent International Commission of Inquiry of 11 March 2013; having regard to the Security Council briefings on Syria issued by the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, Valerie Amos, in particular that of 18 April 2013,

— having regard to the statements of the Secretary-General of the UN and the remarks made by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, António Guterres, to the Security Council, in particular those of 18 April 2013; having regard to the UN Human Rights Council resolutions on the Syrian Arab Republic of 2 December 2011 and 22 March 2013,

— having regard to the Marrakesh meeting of the Group of Friends of the Syrian People and to the international conference held in Paris on 28 January 2013,

— having regard to the latest Syria Regional Response Plan (RRP) for the period from January to June 2013, and to all the RRPs issued by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees since the first one in March 2012,

— having regard to the 2013 Syria Humanitarian Assistance Response Plan (SHARP) of 19 December 2012, prepared by the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic in coordination with the UN System,

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([1]) Texts adopted, P7_TA(2012)0057.
([2]) Texts adopted, P7_TA(2012)0351.

— having regard to the Syrian Humanitarian Forum (SHF), which was set up in spring 2012, and to its most recent meeting on 19 February 2013,

— having regard to the Syrian Humanitarian Bulletins issued by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA),

— having regard to the UN General Assembly resolutions on Syria, in particular Resolution 46/182 on 'Strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian emergency assistance of the United Nations' and the Guiding Principles annexed thereto, and Resolution 67/183 on the situation of human rights in Syria,

— having regard to the summary report of the high-level International Humanitarian Pledging Conference for Syria, held in Kuwait on 30 January 2013,

— having regard to the Final Communiqué of the Action Group for Syria (the 'Geneva Communiqué') of 30 June 2012,

— having regard to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948,

— having regard to the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and the additional protocols thereto,

— having regard to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Optional Protocol thereto on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict, and the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, to all of which Syria is a party,

— having regard to Rule 110(2) and (4) of its Rules of Procedure,

A. whereas up to 16 May 2013 the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) had registered a total of 1 523 626 Syrian refugees in neighbouring countries and in North Africa; whereas the total number of refugees, including those unregistered, is assessed as being much higher; whereas according to the UNHCR 7 million Syrians rely on aid, including 3,1 million children, and the number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) was 4,25 million as at 6 May 2013; whereas according to the same sources the number of refugees (including those awaiting registration) present in receiving countries as at 16 May 2013 was as follows: Turkey, 347 815; Lebanon, 474 461; Jordan, 474 405; Iraq, 148 028; Egypt, 68 865; Morocco, Algeria and Libya, 10 052 (registered); whereas thousands of Syrians are fleeing on a daily basis to neighbouring countries and the UNHCR is projecting a total of 3,5 million refugees from Syria by the end of 2013;

B. whereas the number of Syrian refugees and people in need is rising dramatically as the political and humanitarian situation deteriorates each day that the armed conflict continues; whereas not only civilians, but also several former political and military leaders of the regime, as well as ambassadors, have defected to neighbouring countries and beyond; whereas the armed conflict in Syria is a major threat to the fragile security and stability of the region as a whole; whereas the risk of spill-over effects from the armed conflict is in danger of transitioning from being incidental to structural; whereas the EU and the international community cannot afford an additional catastrophe; whereas a pan-regional political, security and humanitarian disaster would overwhelm international response capacity;

C. whereas thousands of those of who have fled Syria have deserted from the armed forces to escape having to commit war crimes or crimes against humanity, or are evading military service for similar reasons;

D. whereas in May 2013 the UN estimated that at least 80 000 people, mostly civilians, had died because of the violence in Syria;

E. whereas the destruction of essential infrastructure including schools and hospitals, the devaluation of the currency, rising food prices, fuel and electricity shortages and the lack of water, food and medicine have had an impact on the majority of Syrians; whereas physical access to people in need of humanitarian assistance in Syria remains severely constrained and depends on the Assad government's cooperation;

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F. whereas UN agencies have reported progress in organising inter-agency aid convoys across conflict lines to government- or opposition-controlled and contested areas; whereas bureaucratic obstacles and checkpoints throughout the country (both government- and opposition-controlled) are hindering an effective humanitarian response in all areas of Syria;

G. whereas registration remains the key mechanism through which people of concern are identified, protected and assisted, particularly new arrivals who have specific needs, including the disabled, the elderly, unaccompanied minors and separated children, in order to provide prioritised assistance;

H. whereas the host countries have maintained an open-border policy throughout the armed conflict, but have opted for different hosting methods; whereas their ability and capacity to absorb and shelter the increasing stream of refugees is being stretched to the limit as 'incidents' tend to happen regularly along the border lines; whereas Lebanon has gone for a 'no camp' policy and has largely absorbed the refugees into local communities; whereas approximately three quarters of the Syrian refugees in neighbouring countries are living outside camps in urban settings; whereas approximately 350 000 Syrians are staying in 23 refugee camps in Turkey, Jordan and Iraq;

I. whereas aid organisations are currently responding to the Syrian refugee situation in Jordan, Lebanon and Iraq, focusing primarily on women and children, who have special needs but are often under-served in urban refugee communities; whereas the rural spread of the refugee population demands a complex urban registration programme;

J. whereas the refugee-receiving countries are facing tremendous domestic challenges of their own, including economic instability, inflation and unemployment, with Lebanon and Jordan being particularly vulnerable;

K. whereas affording to pay rent is becoming a growing concern for many Syrian refugees as overcrowding and competition for shelter increase and prices rise; whereas refugees are facing significant income-expenditure gaps, limited work opportunities, the exhaustion of their savings and rising debt levels; whereas competition for jobs and rising food prices are factors that are exacerbating tensions between local and refugee populations, particularly in Lebanon and Jordan, which together are hosting more than 1 million refugees;

L. whereas continuing efforts to increase support for host communities are necessary in order to enable them to continue to keep their borders open, assist refugees and provide the requisite infrastructure, and in order to ease tensions and lift the burden on those communities;

M. whereas funding constraints continue to impede the timely and efficient delivery of basic humanitarian assistance; whereas SHARP requires a total of USD 563 million in funding to address the needs of people in Syria; whereas, as at 6 May 2013, the response plan was only 61 % funded;

N. whereas the current UN Regional Response Plan (RRP 4) is being revised for the period up to December 2013; whereas the UN will launch a new appeal for funding on 7 June 2013, which will reflect the rising number of refugees fleeing Syria and their continuing needs, as well as including greater support for host governments and communities, and is likely to amount to USD 3 billion;

O. whereas reports by aid organisations state that only 30 % to 40 % of the total funds pledged so far by the international community have actually been provided;

P. whereas the level of humanitarian assistance is in danger of becoming unsustainable; whereas all the humanitarian actors involved need levels of financial support that are out of proportion with the established humanitarian aid budgets of traditional donors; whereas extraordinary funding mechanisms have to be established in order to meet basic needs arising from the Syrian crisis;

Q. whereas the EU is the largest donor; whereas on 22 April 2013 the total humanitarian assistance committed by the EU in response to the Syrian crisis amounted to almost EUR 473 million, including EUR 200 million from the EU itself and nearly EUR 273 million from Member States; whereas on 12 May 2013 the Commission announced additional funding of EUR 65 million;

R. whereas some 400 000 Palestinian refugees have been affected inside Syria; whereas the Palestinians have largely remained neutral in the conflict; whereas almost 50 000 Palestinians have been registered by the UN Relief and Works Agency in Lebanon, and almost 5 000 in Jordan; whereas Jordan has closed its border to Palestinians fleeing the conflict in Syria, and whereas they are to a great extent prevented from working in Lebanon; whereas Iraqi, Afghan, Somali and Sudanese refugees in Syria are also facing renewed displacement;

S. whereas safety and security in Jordan's Zaatari Camp have degenerated, with theft and fires taking place; whereas Zaatari has become Jordan's fourth-largest city, housing more than 170 000 people; whereas riots and violent protests in the refugee camps are motivated by poor living conditions and delays in receiving assistance; whereas the overall lack of security continues to endanger lives in the camps, affecting humanitarian workers; whereas aid workers have been attacked, hospitalised and even killed while distributing aid, and whereas journalists have been beaten;

T. whereas according to international organisations, women and girls in refugee camps are the victims of increasing sexual violence, with rape being used as a weapon of war; whereas there are no viable medical options for Syrian refugees who are survivors of sexual violence; whereas a disproportionate number of young girls and women in the refugee camps are getting married; whereas, according to several sources, temporary Mutah 'marriages of pleasure' with Syrian refugees are taking place in refugee camps;

U. whereas in March 2013 the UN launched an independent investigation into allegations concerning the possible use of chemical weapons in Syria; whereas these allegations may have contributed to the mass displacement of people; whereas the Syrian regime has refused to allow the UN investigation team into the country;

1. Expresses grave concern at the ongoing humanitarian crisis in Syria and the implications for its neighbouring countries; expresses concern that the exodus of refugees from Syria is continuing to accelerate; recalls that the Assad government bears primary responsibility for taking care of the well-being of its people;

2. Condemns again, in the strongest terms, the brutality and atrocities perpetrated by the Syrian regime against the country's population; expresses its deepest concern at the gravity of the widespread and systematic human rights violations and possible crimes against humanity authorised and/or perpetrated by the Syrian authorities, the Syrian army, security forces and affiliated militias; condemns the summary extrajudicial executions and all other forms of human rights violations committed by groups and forces opposing the regime of President Assad; reiterates its call for President Bashar al-Assad and his regime to step aside immediately, so as to allow a peaceful, inclusive and democratic Syrian-led transition to take place in the country;

3. Calls on all armed actors to put an immediate end to violence in Syria; stresses again that international humanitarian law, the main aim of which is to protect civilians, must be fully upheld by all actors in the crisis; stresses that those responsible for the widespread, systemic and gross human rights violations committed in Syria over the past 24 months must be held accountable and brought to justice; strongly supports, in this connection, the calls made by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights to refer the situation in Syria to the International Criminal Court;

4. Extends its condolences to the victims' families; applauds the courage of the Syrian people and reiterates its solidarity with their struggle for freedom, dignity and democracy;

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5. Believes that the key to solving the conflict lies in political mechanisms facilitating a Syrian-led political process that will promote a swift, credible and effective political solution in conjunction with those genuinely committed to transition, while ensuring full respect for the universal values of democracy, the rule of law, human rights and fundamental freedoms, with special regard to the rights of ethnic, cultural and religious minorities and of women; reaffirms that it is a priority to keep the humanitarian and political tracks separate in order to facilitate access to those in need; calls for the EU and the European External Action Service to develop a roadmap for political governance in the liberated areas, including the possibility of lifting the economic sanctions;

6. Notes that all deserters from Syria are entitled to further protection, being at risk on other grounds than those set out in paragraph 26 of the UNHCR guidelines, namely 'excessive or disproportionately severe' punishment, possibly amounting to torture, inhuman or degrading treatment or even arbitrary execution;

7. Calls on the UN Security Council (UNSC) members, in particular Russia and China, to fulfil their responsibility to put an end to the violence and repression against the Syrian people, inter alia by adopting a UNSC resolution based on the UNSC press statement of 18 April 2013, and to mandate humanitarian aid deliveries in all areas of Syria; calls on the VP/HR to do her utmost to secure the adoption of a UNSC resolution by exerting effective diplomatic pressure on both Russia and China; calls for the EU to continue to explore, within the UNSC, all the options under the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) framework, in close cooperation with the US, Turkey and the League of Arab States, in order to assist the Syrian people and halt the bloodshed; strongly supports the work of the Independent Commission of Inquiry on the situation in Syria and welcomes its updated report;

8. Supports the joint call by US Secretary of State John Kerry and Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov to convene an international peace conference on Syria as soon as possible as a follow-up to the Geneva Conference of June 2012;

9. Expresses its concern about further militarisation of the conflict and sectarian violence; notes the role of different regional actors, including in the delivery of arms, and is concerned about the spill-over effects of the Syrian conflict in neighbouring countries in terms of the humanitarian crisis, security and stability; strongly condemns the car bomb attacks of 11 May 2013 which killed and injured dozens of people near a Syrian refugee base in the town of Reyhanli, in the Hatay province of south-eastern Turkey, as well as instances of shelling and shooting by Syrian armed forces into neighbouring countries; supports the VP/HR's condemnation of terrorist attacks of any kind;

10. Stresses that the EU has a particular responsibility for stability and security in its neighbourhood and calls on the VP/HR and the Commissioner for Enlargement and European Neighbourhood Policy to ensure that the EU plays a leading role in preventing the armed conflict in Syria from spilling over into neighbouring countries;

11. Pays tribute to host communities and to Syria's neighbouring countries, in particular Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey and Iraq, for their resourcefulness in providing shelter and humanitarian aid to families fleeing the armed conflict in Syria, but is seriously concerned about the dangerous saturation point that those countries are approaching on account of the influx of Syrian refugees, which could set off unprecedented regional instability;

12. Supports and welcomes the considerable contribution made by the Commission and the Member States to international humanitarian assistance programmes, and the political leadership shown by the Commissioner for International Cooperation, Humanitarian Aid and Crisis Response; welcomes the Commission's diversification of humanitarian partners in Syria in order to provide more efficient and widespread aid, particularly in regions outside government control; calls on EU actors and the Member States to better coordinate their actions and assistance inside and outside Syria;

13. Urges the Commission to present a comprehensive aid package — serving as an example to other major donors — to address the humanitarian crisis in Syria and its neighbouring countries, based on three pillars: (i) increased humanitarian assistance (via ECHO), (ii) support to help host countries strengthen local communities and increase capacity and infrastructure (via DEVCO) and (iii) the swift introduction of macro-financial assistance packages for Lebanon and Jordan;

14. Underlines the importance of keeping international borders open and urges the international community to support Lebanon and Jordan generously in managing the growing refugee influx; urges all regional host governments and other actors to uphold the principles of non-refoulement and equal treatment of refugees;

15. Calls for the EU to take appropriate, responsible measures regarding the possible influx of refugees into its Member States;

16. Calls for the Member States immediately to cease their reported use of prolonged detention periods and the practice of refoulement, which are in direct violation of international and EU law;

17. Calls for immediate humanitarian assistance for all those in need in Syria, with special regard to the wounded, refugees, internally displaced persons, women and children; commends the efforts of the International Committee of the Red Cross and the UNRWA in this regard; demands that the Assad government allow humanitarian organisations full access to the country; stresses the need to increase cooperation among the various actors operating on the ground, such as local authorities, international organisations and NGOs, including cooperation at the border; considers that assistance protocols and monitoring at the border would bring added value;

18. Calls on the EU to support the establishment of safe havens along the Turkish-Syrian border, and possibly within Syria, as well as the creation of humanitarian corridors by the international community;

19. Welcomes the immense humanitarian aid operation to which international and local organisations are contributing under the auspices of the OCHA and the UNHCR and pays tribute to all humanitarian aid and health workers, international and local, for their courage and perseverance; calls on the EU and the international community to enhance the protection of civilians, including humanitarian workers and medical personnel; urges the international community to find a solution to the ongoing lack of security and problems with law and order in refugee camps, inter alia by setting up a new security initiative within the camps; urges all parties to the conflict to respect international humanitarian law and to facilitate humanitarian access to allow aid workers inside and outside the country to cope with the growing needs;

20. Calls on all countries, and in particular the EU Member States, swiftly to fulfil the pledges they made at the Kuwait donor conference of 30 January 2013; calls for the EU and the international community to set up accountability mechanisms in order to ensure that all pledged funds reach their designated beneficiaries;

21. Denounces the practice of sexual violence in Syria's armed conflict, which is also used as a weapon of war and hence constitutes a war crime, urges the EU and the international community to allocate specific resources to ending sexual violence and calls on host communities to provide proper medical treatment to those who have been victims of sexual violence;

22. Calls on donors, in the light of the growing needs of the Palestinian refugee population in Syria and its neighbouring countries, to fund the UNRWA appropriately, and calls on the UNRWA to generously support ongoing efforts to shore up the resilience of those refugees and minimise their suffering and displacement;

23. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission, the Vice-President of the Commission/High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, the parliaments and governments of the Member States, the Secretary-General of the United Nations and all the parties involved in the conflict in Syria.