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UK re-establishes diplomatic relations with Syria in first ministerial visit for 14 years

Foreign Secretary’s visit to Syria marks first by a UK minister in 14 years and renews the UK and Syria’s diplomatic relationship

commitment to support Syria as the new government seeks to rebuild Syria’s economy, deliver an inclusive political transition and forge a path to justice for the victims of the Assad regime

new UK funding to assist with removal of Assad era chemical weapons and provide urgent humanitarian assistance in Syria, to bolster UK and Middle East security, tackle irregular migration, and deliver on the government’s Plan for Change

Eight months on from the collapse of the Assad regime, the UK has officially re-established diplomatic relations with the Syrian Government following the Foreign Secretary’s visit to Damascus today.

As the first UK minister to visit in 14 years, the Foreign Secretary emphasised that the UK will support the Syrian Government to deliver its commitments to build a more secure and prosperous future for Syrians, increasing security in the wider region and the UK.

The Foreign Secretary met President Al-Sharaa and Foreign Minister al-Shaibani to reiterate the importance of an inclusive and representative political transition in Syria and offer continued UK support to the Syrian people.

A stable Syria is in the UK’s interests. We want to ensure that Daesh’s territorial defeat endures, and they can never resurge, and we want to prevent vulnerable Syrians from being exploited by people smuggling gangs across Europe. Building closer diplomatic partnerships with Syria is critical to safeguard UK security, in line with the government’s Plan for Change.

Foreign Secretary David Lammy said:

As the first UK Minister to visit Syria since the fall of Assad’s brutal regime, I’ve seen first-hand the remarkable progress Syrians have made in rebuilding their lives and their country.

After over a decade of conflict, there is renewed hope for the Syrian people. The UK is re-establishing diplomatic relations because it is in our interests to support the new government to deliver their commitment to build a stable, more secure and prosperous future for all Syrians.

A stable Syria is in the UK's interests, reducing the risk of irregular migration, ensuring the destruction of chemical weapons, tackling the threat of terrorism and delivering the government's Plan for Change.

During his visit to Syria, the Foreign Secretary met Syrian Civil Defence volunteers (White Helmets) to learn more about the vital work they carry out across the country, including with the safe removal of unexploded ordnance and emergency lifesaving medical work.

The fall of Assad presents an opportunity for the new Syrian government to fully declare and destroy Assad's evil chemical weapons programme. As part of the visit, the UK has committed an additional £2 million this financial year to the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) to support their vital work addressing the horrific legacy of Assad's chemical weapons in Syria.

The UK contribution will support the OPCW's operational requirements in Syria as they help the Syrian Government fulfil their commitments to eliminate Assad's chemical weapons once and for all.

Demonstrating the UK's continued commitment to sustainable development and Syria's recovery from conflict, the Foreign Secretary met women-led businesses in Syria, which have been supported by the UK's livelihoods and economic recovery programme.

UK support is set to continue, with the additional £94.5 million package announced today, which will provide urgent humanitarian aid to Syrians, support Syria's longer-term recovery through education and livelihoods, and support countries hosting Syrian refugees in the region.

The Foreign Secretary will travel on to Kuwait where strengthening regional security and boosting bilateral relations will be top of the agenda in meetings with His Highness the Crown Prince, His Highness the Prime Minister and His Excellency the Foreign Minister.

The Foreign Secretary will advocate for UK businesses to have access to new opportunities to support Kuwaiti growing markets – further advancing business engagement between UK and Kuwait and the wider region.

The Foreign Secretary will also announce a new partnership with Kuwait to tackle the humanitarian crisis in Sudan. New funding will help provide nutrition support and restore clean drinking water supplies, as Sudan faces both famine and a devastating cholera outbreak. Support will also be made available to fund lifesaving work in Somalia where conflict and the climate crisis are driving pressing humanitarian needs.

Background

the UK has provided £4.5 billion of assistance to Syria and countries in the region since 2011

over the past 2 years the UK has provided more than £5 million to the White Helmets in support of their lifesaving emergency medical, firefighting and search rescue services. This includes £2.25 million this financial year to continue this work and ensure a smooth transition of their activities to the government

the UK has already provided £837,300 to the OPCW Syria Missions since the fall of Assad to support their immediate work in ensuring the safe and rapid destruction of Syria’s chemical weapons

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