Statement by Commissioner Christos Stylianides as Syrian refugees reach the 4 million mark (9 July 2015)

Brussels, 9 July 2015

Almost four and half years into the conflict in Syria, another sad milestone has been reached: over four million Syrians have become registered as refugees after fleeing the war to seek safety in neighbouring countries. This is almost four times the population of my home country Cyprus. This unprecedented number makes the Syrian refugee crisis one of the biggest humanitarian tragedies since WWII.

2 million of the refugees are children. They have lost almost everything. Some 5,000 schools have been destroyed, occupied or targeted in the conflict in gross violation of International Humanitarian Law. Schools in host countries have struggled to accommodate new students. With 2.4 million children out of school, it puts an entire generation at risk, destroying young people's hopes for the future. We have a collective responsibility to prevent this from happening.

At the same time, the generosity of Syria's neighbouring countries in hosting these victims of the war next door can only be commended. They have made many sacrifices and have stretched their capacities beyond limits. They need the ongoing support of the international community and they can count on the European Union as the leading donor to the crisis to continue to provide this support. We also fully understand their concerns regarding the deteriorating security situation – that borders are policed more tightly, and that arrivals from Syria are viewed with greater suspicion. However, I trust host countries will continue to ensure that this huge Syrian refugee community, which is now the second-largest after the Palestinians, can still find a safe haven.

The EU has shown its solidarity with the people of Syria and neighbouring host countries, providing more than €3.7 billion since the beginning of the crisis. At the annual pledging conference for the Syria crisis in Kuwait in March, the EU delivered the biggest pledge with EUR 1.1 billion.

Yet with no end to the crisis in sight, there is a need, more than ever, for the donor community to deliver on its pledges and boost assistance to address the further growing needs. At the same time, the entire humanitarian community must step up its efforts to ensure the protection of those displaced by conflict and to guarantee access to those in need.

This said, humanitarian aid can only mitigate the human suffering. What is needed is a halt to fighting and to find a political solution to the conflict. The EU supports all efforts to this end. Until then, I strongly urge all parties to the conflict to ensure the protection of civilians and humanitarian workers risking their lives to help them These people count on us and we must not let them down.

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