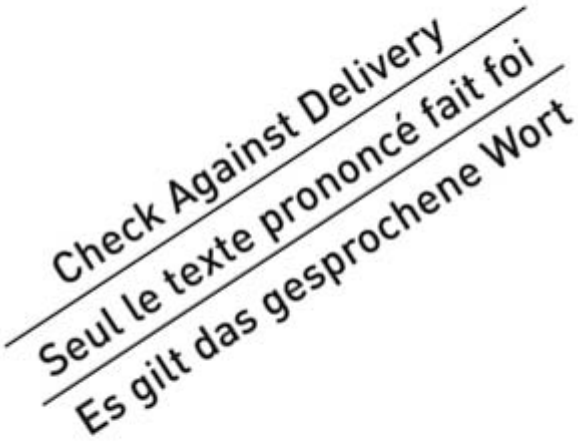
EUROPEAN COMMISSION

José Manuel Durão Barroso
President of the European Commission

Statement by President Barroso following the meeting with UN leaders on humanitarian support to Syria



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Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen,

I am delighted to welcome Ms Valerie Amos, Under Secretary General and Emergency Relief Coordinator UNOCHA, Mr António Guterres, UN High Commissioner for Refugees, and Mr Anthony Lake, UNICEF Executive Director and also Ertharin Cousin, World Food Programme Executive Director, here to the European Commission.

Today we have discussed the humanitarian situation in Syria, which continues to deteriorate dramatically.

The United Nations now estimates that 9.3 million people are affected by the on-going violence, with approximately 6.5 million people internally displaced within Syria.

Aid agencies continue to face significant constraints in reaching people in need. The escalating violence in the country is making it harder and more dangerous for humanitarian workers to do their jobs. This is why the European Union has mobilized further resources. And this is why our aid is channelled through mandated and professional humanitarian organizations in accordance with humanitarian principles, which include of course the UN agencies.

We have just signed the largest ever contracts for humanitarian aid between the Commission and our UN partners. I am proud that we can today commit 147 million euros to UNHCR, the World Food Programme and UNICEF. At the same time, we all know that a definitive solution for the conflict and for the dramatic humanitarian situation we are facing can only come from political negotiations.

The war in Syria is a crisis like no other. I have said it before but it bears repeating: the suffering of the Syrian people is a stain on the world's conscience. We cannot, we should not forget what is going on there. It is a conflict which is forcing people moving out of their homes, fleeing their own country to seek safety. I could witness this personally when I visited the Zaatari refugee camp in Jordan last year, with Anthony Lake Executive Director of UNICEF. I could see the distress caused in the refugees but also in host countries.

According to all the reports we received today, not only from the representatives of the United Nations, also from the President of the International Red Cross Committee, the situation is now much worse. So, my appeal to all the leaders in Europe is the following: if one year ago we knew how it would be today, what could have been the decisions then? I am sure that if we could have that focus, the decisions could have been much more ambitious. If we don't recognise the really exceptional nature of this crisis, one year from now it will be a much worse situation. So, my appeal to all the leaders of the European Union, and indeed of the world, is let's focus now thinking what can happen one year from now if we don't act just now.

Tomorrow, at the European Council, tomorrow and the day after tomorrow, I will certainly have the opportunity to make this point to all Heads of State and Government of the European Union. I know that you have many others business to do, but I also think that this humanitarian tragedy cannot become a routine. It has to be high on the agenda of the public concern in Europe and indeed, in the world.

We have a moral responsibility to act because solidarity is at the core of our European values. But we also have an interest to act because this is a crisis in our own neighbourhood, and we know the consequences will be very dramatic if we are not able to articulate a much more comprehensive response. We also have a pragmatic stake in the fate of so many millions of refugees and displaced people right on our doorstep.

So, I would like to say to Under Secretary General Valerie Amos, to a good friend António Guterres, to Mr Anthony Lake, to Ertharin Cousin and to all the others of the humanitarian committee, who were sharing their opinions with us today, also from the biggest donors from United States, to Canada, to Japan, to the UK. I would like to thank them for this input and I would like to tell them that the European Union will remain committed.

Two days ago, the UN appealed for a record €4.7 billion for Syria operations in 2014. The European Union (the European Commission and the Member States) is the largest donor since the start of the crisis, with more than € 2 billion donated. In-kind assistance of some € 3.25 million has also been provided to Turkey and Jordan. And €461 million has been mobilised for education, support to host communities and local societies.

We count on the UN Agencies to continue delivering vitally needed aid to people directly affected by the Syrian crisis. Therefore, we call international donors to increase their financing to cope with the dimensions of this crisis. This will be our main message also at the second pledging conference in Kuwait next month, where the European Commission will be represented by Kristalina Georgieva.

And at this occasion, I would like to also praise Kristalina Georgieva's work - not only the extremely committed work but also the competence and professionalism in which Kristalina, her team and ECHO have been mobilising at European level. And I think we are now proud of what we are doing, as European Union, specifically here in the European Commission, but as European Union together with our Member States and with our partners. It is important that the public in the European Union knows about what is going on. That, yes we are proud of what we have been doing, but what we are doing is stronger and stronger. Yet the situation is becoming worse and worse in spite of all the efforts.

Thank you for your attention.