

PRESS RELEASE

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Brussels IV Conference on 'Supporting the future of Syria and the region': co-chairs' declaration

1. The Fourth Conference on "Supporting the Future of Syria and the Region" took place on 30 June 2020 in a virtual format. It was hosted by the European Union (EU) and co-chaired with the United Nations (UN). The Conference was preceded by virtual Days of Dialogue and by a week of side events.
2. Building upon the work of the conferences held in Kuwait (2013-15), London (2016) and Brussels (2017-19), Brussels IV renewed and strengthened the political, humanitarian and financial commitment of the international community to support the Syrian people, the neighbouring countries and the communities most affected by the conflict. The Conference brought together 84 delegations including 57 States, 10 regional organisations and International Financial Institutions as well as 17 UN agencies.
3. The Conference acknowledged Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey's extraordinary solidarity and tremendous efforts towards Syrian refugees even as some of the countries face severe socio-economic challenges. Iraq's and Egypt's efforts were also highlighted and commended. The Conference reiterated the unwavering support of the international community to Syria's neighbours in addressing the specific short, medium and long-term challenges that they are facing as a result of the Syria conflict and of wider development challenges.
4. Participants to the Brussels IV Conference announced their pledges for both Syria and the region: US\$ 5.5 billion (€ 4.9 billion) for 2020 and multi-year pledges of close to US\$ 2.2 billion (€ 2 billion) for 2021 and beyond. In addition, international financial institutions and donors announced around \$ 6.7 billion (€ 6 billion) in loans on concessional terms. The Conference warmly welcomed the delivery by the international community of funds well in excess of pledges made at Brussels III for 2019. Co-chairs and main donors agreed to widen the resource base and ensure greater timeliness, predictability, coherence and effectiveness of the aid. The pledges made at Brussels IV are set out in the attached fundraising annex.
5. The humanitarian and resilience needs of people inside Syria and in the region remain enormous. In 2020, the Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) for Syria amounts to US\$ 3.4 billion to provide immediate life-saving, humanitarian, protection and resilience support to 9.8 million people within the country. In addition, US\$ 5.2 billion is required for the Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan (3RP) to provide humanitarian and resilience-related assistance to over nine million refugees and vulnerable host communities in Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq and Egypt.
6. The worsening economic context in Syria and the region and the protracted nature of the crisis warrants further support. US\$ 384 million are required to address the public health and socio-economic consequences of the COVID-19 crisis in Syria, with an additional US\$ 806 million needed across the region, in particular to provide immediate assistance as well as to support host countries' national systems and recovery plans, vulnerable families and host communities.
7. In spite of the logistical challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, Brussels IV saw an impressive effort to reach out to civil society representatives in Syria and the region. More than 1400 organisations were consulted on all key topics pertaining to the international response to the Syria conflict throughout the preparations for the Conference, including through extensive online consultations and many interactive side events over the week preceding the Ministerial meeting. In keeping with the practice of the Brussels Conferences, two Days of Dialogue were held virtually on 22 and 23 June where Syrian, Jordanian, Lebanese, Turkish and international Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) interacted with Ministers and senior officials from refugee-hosting countries, the EU and UN agencies. The EU also launched an online consultative space for Syrian civil society to promote engagement beyond the Brussels Conferences.
8. A diverse group of Syrian civil society organisations also met in closed-door sessions of the Civil Society Support Room (CSSR) on the margins of the Conference to exchange views on the future of Syria, the political process in Geneva, the needs and challenges facing Syrian civil society across the spectrum, human rights and humanitarian protection issues, and a range of livelihood issues concerning the Syrian people. They presented their views to EU High Representative/Vice-President of the European Commission (HR/VP) Josep Borrell and UN Special Envoy for Syria Geir O. Pedersen.
9. Brussels IV put special emphasis on Syrian women and on organisations representing their views, particularly women-led organisations, recognising women's vital importance in creating the foundation for sustainable peace in Syria in line with UN Security Council resolution 1325 (2000). The Syrian Women's Advisory Board held a closed-door session with HR/VP Borrell and UN Special Envoy Pedersen where it provided insights on how to advance women's meaningful participation and ensure that the women's rights agenda remains core to the political process.

Political

10. Conference participants recalled that after almost a decade of conflict, violence and violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights continue. They expressed concern about the significant worsening of Syria's economy over the last year, which contributes to a trajectory of increased humanitarian need, poverty and food insecurity, as well as protracted instability. While an uneasy and fragile calm has prevailed more recently in north-west and north-east Syria, following major military escalations and mass displacement in the Idlib region earlier this year, security conditions in southern Syria continue to deteriorate and require increased attention and focus. In the central and eastern desert a worrying resurgence of ISIL/Da'esh has occurred.
11. Participants stressed that Syria's instability reverberates far beyond the country's borders. The neighbouring countries of Syria, while already struggling with complex domestic challenges, have welcomed 5.5 million Syrian refugees. Significant numbers of Syrian refugees have also sought refuge in Europe. Consequences are being felt as far as Libya, where

- significant numbers of Syrian combatants are reported to have been sent to fight on opposite sides.
12. The Conference reaffirmed that a sustainable solution to the Syrian conflict can only be based on the Geneva Communiqué (2012) and the full implementation of UN Security Council resolution 2254 (2015) calling for a Syrian-led, Syrian-owned political process facilitated by the UN to reach a political settlement that meets the legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people. The political process aims to end the conflict in Syria, establish credible and inclusive, non-sectarian governance and set a process in motion for drafting a new constitution paving the way towards free and fair elections under UN supervision, including the diaspora. The Conference underlined the importance of women's full and meaningful participation at all stages of the political process at a minimum of 30% representation in decision-making structures, with the goal of parity. Participants also recalled the commitment of the international community to preserve Syria's sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity.
 13. The Conference expressed its strong support for the tireless efforts of the UN Special Envoy for Syria towards the full implementation of resolution 2254 (2015), including his work aimed at reconvening the UN-facilitated, Syrian-led and -owned Constitutional Committee, the discussion of confidence-building measures with the parties and the establishment of a safe, calm and neutral environment. Brussels IV reiterated the need for the conflict parties to engage meaningfully in the political process. While the Constitutional Committee is only a part of the political process as mandated by resolution 2254 (2015), progress in its work could help open the door to a wider political process and contribute to a political settlement.
 14. The Conference welcomed the Special Envoy's priority on the need to release detainees and abductees and to clarify the fate of missing persons, as well as his intention to actively pursue efforts to scale up action on this issue in his engagement with all concerned. The Conference recalled that arbitrary detention and enforced disappearances are violations of human rights and international humanitarian law and called upon all parties, in particular the Syrian civilian, military and security actors, to release persons arbitrarily detained and address the issue of missing persons in line with UN Security Council resolutions 2254 (2015), 2268 (2016), and 2474 (2019). Unimpeded access to all detention facilities for independent monitors and international humanitarian organisations is a necessity, as well as work to continue monitoring and providing information on forcibly disappeared and missing persons. Harassing the families of civil society representatives and political activists is also reprehensible.
 15. The Conference called on all parties to the conflict to take urgent measures to prevent any new disappearances, notably of persons deprived of their liberty. It called for the establishment of mechanisms to clarify the fate and whereabouts of all missing persons, without distinction. Participants also stressed the need to support the families of those unaccounted for and the need to deal with the past.
 16. Brussels IV expressed its full support for the call made by the UN Special Envoy for a nationwide ceasefire in Syria, building on the appeal by the UN Secretary-General for a global ceasefire. Participants reiterated the international community's strong concerns about the risks of a further escalation of violence in Syria. They called on all parties involved to uphold their obligations under international law and maintain their commitments to the ceasefire agreements, in particular the September 2018 Memorandum of Understanding between Russia and Turkey aimed at establishing a demilitarised zone in the north-west and its additional protocol dated 5 March 2020. While the challenge posed by UN Security Council-listed terrorist groups must be dealt with, this must be done through a cooperative, targeted and effective approach that safeguards stability and in full respect for the protection of the estimated four million civilians residing in north-west Syria, in an effort to avoid another humanitarian catastrophe including high levels of mass displacement as seen earlier this year during the military offensive across the region. Efforts to combat terrorism must respect all parties' obligations under international humanitarian and human rights law.
 17. The Conference underlined that an enduring defeat of ISIL/Da'esh and other terrorist groups must remain a key international priority, including efforts to avoid any prospect of a resurgence of terrorism. Participants also reiterated that a lasting eradication of terrorism in Syria requires a genuine political settlement that addresses the root causes of the conflict.

Humanitarian

18. The Conference noted that humanitarian assistance and protection represent an essential lifeline for millions of Syrians to alleviate some of the conflict's worst effects. There are currently an estimated 11.1 million people, almost half of whom are children, in need of humanitarian assistance inside Syria. Almost 12 million Syrians remain displaced, including 6.1 million people displaced internally and 5.5 million Syrians residing as refugees in neighbouring countries.
19. Participants noted that the COVID-19 pandemic, together with the economic crisis in Lebanon, have further increased needs in Syria and in the region. In the past year, food prices in Syria have risen by 133% and the Syrian pound has weakened by 400%, aggravating the socio-economic situation of the population and creating new humanitarian challenges. Almost half the population – some 9.3 million people – are now estimated to be food insecure across Syria, an increase of 1.4 million in the past six months. At the same time, those experiencing severe food insecurity doubled – from around 570,000 to more than one million. Participants highlighted the impact of the economic crisis on women, and female-headed households in particular.
20. The Conference reconfirmed the importance of delivering humanitarian assistance to all civilians in need in line with the humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence. Participants recognised that, on average, 6.2 million people in Syria received some form of assistance and protection each month during the first months of 2020. Participants noted that an urgent and concerted effort is needed to improve humanitarian access to enable prioritising people most in need.
21. Participants reiterated the urgency to continue to make use of all humanitarian response modalities in a complementary manner to reach those most affected. In particular, Conference participants urged Security Council members to renew cross-border authorisations for the use of the Bab al-Salaam and Bab al-Hawa border crossings for an additional 12 months, and authorise the UN to deliver cross-border into the north-east. A combination of more cross-border and cross-line access must ensure aid delivery to all Syrians in need wherever they are and as long as needed.
22. The co-chairs called on all parties to the conflict to abide by their legal obligations under international humanitarian law, exercising their responsibilities in full to facilitate unconditional, safe, timely, unhindered and sustained humanitarian access to all those in need across Syria. Humanitarian actors must be allowed to carry out impartial and independent needs assessments, select beneficiaries and partners and monitor programmes, including protection monitoring, without any restrictions and independently from considerations other than vulnerability and need.
23. The Conference stressed that Syria remains a protection crisis with multiple protection challenges affecting the lives of millions of Syrians on a daily basis, including their psychosocial and mental health needs. It recalled that the protection of civilians, including all humanitarian workers, and of civilian infrastructure is an obligation under international humanitarian law and international human rights law.
24. The Conference recalled that affordable access to civil documentation such as birth, marriage and death certificates or identity cards is a key protection measure, both for Syrians living inside Syria and refugees and other Syrian nationals living abroad. Participants called for respect for housing, land and property rights, including notably for women, and availability and access for all Syrians to justice and to basic services without restrictions or limitations. They further stressed that housing, land and property rights and their restitution are a core factor for the rebuilding of Syrian society. These are a

- cornerstone for ensuring society's stability and enabling Syrians to plan for a future life together in peace and dignity.
25. The Conference noted that conflict has continued to generate large-scale displacement of people, noting that nearly one million people were newly displaced in north-west Syria between December 2019 and March 2020. It also noted that an estimated 15,000 refugees and 223,000 IDPs returned to some areas in Syria in 2020. It noted the importance of humanitarian and non-humanitarian assistance to work towards the removal of obstacles to return and to support refugees and internally displaced people, as well as the communities to which they have returned spontaneously, including through a stronger, integrated resilience approach.
 26. The co-chairs and the donor community underscored the need to maintain a comprehensive protection and durable solutions strategy. While conditions inside Syria do not lend themselves to the promotion or organisation of large-scale voluntary return, in conditions of safety and dignity in line with international law, participants underscored that return is a right to be exercised based on an individual's free and informed decision. Support should be guided by refugees' needs, views, concerns and decisions, based on accurate and factual information, on whether to return or not at the present time. It should not contribute to demographic engineering. Returnees also need security from armed conflict, political persecution and arbitrary arrests, access to functioning services, livelihood opportunities as well as other considerations which would enable a voluntary, safe and dignified return. Maintaining assistance levels and access to protection, livelihoods and services in host countries is a key component in enabling a voluntary decision by refugees to return, free from push factors. Participants also reiterated the importance of the *Protection Thresholds and Parameters for Refugee Return to Syria*, issued by the UN in February 2018.
 27. The Conference also recognised resettlement to third countries as an essential protection tool for refugees with heightened protection risks. Its importance was highlighted, together with other legal pathways, in offering safe and dignified access to a longer-term solution beyond the immediate region.
 28. Participants recalled that all children allegedly associated with armed groups and captured in the course of military operations should be treated primarily as victims of recruitment, in accordance with international humanitarian law and international norms and standards pertaining to the rights of the child.
 29. The Humanitarian Response Plan has three strategic objectives: saving lives and alleviating suffering, enhancing protection, and increasing resilience. Around 90% of the population is estimated to live in poverty and this is likely to worsen as a result of regional dynamics. While humanitarian life-saving assistance will be prioritised, efforts should be stepped up to support early recovery, resilience, community capacity-building and self-reliance through to the provision of basic services, livelihoods and local economic development taking into account those hardest hit by the COVID-19 pandemic, including women and youth. In a context where space for civil society is narrow and at risk of closing, such support can help enhance social cohesion, empower local communities to identify their needs and defend their rights, and ensure a more protective environment limiting the recourse to harmful coping strategies such as child labour or early marriage. Conflict sensitivity is key to the success of this approach. In particular, the UN reiterated that its Parameters and Principles for UN assistance in Syria will guide UN assistance beyond emergency life-saving aid.
 30. Support will continue to prioritise humanitarian life-saving needs with an increased focus on sustaining decent livelihood opportunities, skills development and economic empowerment, particularly for youth and women who face multi-dimensional vulnerabilities and are disproportionately impacted by both the conflict as well as the COVID-19 pandemic. Community participation and empowerment in the articulation and prioritisation of needs remain key. It was stressed that funding decisions shall be gender responsive and conflict-sensitive, be based on independent needs assessments, shall in no way benefit or assist parties who have allegedly committed war crimes or crimes against humanity and shall not condone, or indirectly entrench, social and demographic engineering.
 31. The conference agreed that education and child protection remain key areas for investment. Every year, over one third or nearly 3 million school-age Syrian children do not attend any form of education. Public education is under pressure across the region. Progress on providing access to quality education, non-formal education and catch-up programmes should be accelerated – including remote and distance learning due to the COVID-19 risk – as they play a vital role in protecting children, many of whom are suffering psychosocial impacts of prolonged conflict and displacement, and paves the way for them to participate constructively in their communities and societies.

Regional recovery and development

32. The co-chairs underlined that the remarkable contributions of host countries and local host communities in receiving large Syrian refugee populations and providing them with access to national services are fully in line with the spirit of the Global Compact on Refugees, as recognised notably at the first Global Refugee Forum in 2019. Participants acknowledged the deepening vulnerability of Syrian refugees, Palestinian refugees from Syria and host communities, which should be addressed through sustained support. The Conference recognised that socio-economic challenges have led to a rise in vulnerabilities in some of these countries for the populations at large and, in particular, vulnerable groups. It noted that temporary legal residence is central to refugees' ability to access protection and services.
33. The international community reconfirmed its unwavering commitment to supporting Syria's neighbours in continuing to address the multiple challenges they face, by sustaining humanitarian aid and resilience support, including through the 3RP, and by strengthening national systems and response capacities to serve all. Donors will continue to strengthen the national capacities of Syria's neighbours as well as their ownership and leadership in the response.
34. The Conference recognised the progress made by governments, donors and the UN in delivering on the commitments undertaken at past conferences, including through the EU-Jordan and EU-Lebanon Partnership Priorities, the EU's Facility for Refugees in Turkey, the EU Regional Trust Fund in Response to the Syrian Crisis and the Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey partnership papers prepared for the Brussels II Conference. Against a backdrop of continued extreme vulnerability, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, more should nevertheless be done to maintain effective protection of refugees, further improve their access to healthcare, education and livelihoods, ensure respect of their basic human and legal rights, and increase their potential for self-reliance, and create opportunities to contribute to the economic development of their host countries. The EU Regional Trust Fund in response to the Syrian conflict has allocated €2.2 billion to actions supporting refugees in the neighbouring countries and host communities primarily in Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq and Turkey. The Facility for Refugees in Turkey mobilised €6 billion for 2016-2019: by the end of that period, the entire operational budget had been committed, €4.7 billion already contracted and €3.4 billion disbursed. This support is project-based, with activities continuing until 2025. The Conference welcomed the work already done and the continuation of effective delivery of assistance under the Facility for Refugees in Turkey.
35. The Conference recognised that, in Syria and the region, the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated public health and socio-economic challenges. Refugees from Syria as well as IDPs inside Syria are particularly vulnerable, alongside the communities hosting them, and especially women and children within those groups.
36. The Conference praised Turkey for hosting the largest refugee population in the world and providing them with access to national services such as healthcare and education, social and municipal services, and opportunities for labour market integration. Turkey's comprehensive refugee response continues to reflect good practice, lessons learned and valuable experience gained in the development of the Global Compact on Refugees, as well as in the framework of the 3RP and of

the successful EU-Turkey co-operation through the Facility for Refugees in Turkey. The Conference reiterated continued solidarity with Turkey.

37. The Conference commended the significant and continued efforts made by Lebanon to host the highest number of refugees per capita in the world. Conference participants acknowledged that Lebanon and its population are facing major challenges stemming from the severe economic and financial crisis, exacerbated by the spread of COVID-19 pandemic, and from the consequences of ten years of conflict in Syria. They stressed their readiness to engage constructively with Lebanon's newly formed Government, in line with the statement of the International Support Group on 11 December 2019. They acknowledged the adoption by the Government of Lebanon of a financial and recovery plan and encouraged the Government to swiftly enact structural reforms, including policy commitments made at the CEDRE Conference, in order to tackle the acute economic challenges and respond to the needs and expectations of the Lebanese people. The Conference welcomed the decision to begin discussions with the International Monetary Fund. It underlined that appropriate protection and social safety nets must be strengthened and guaranteed for all vulnerable groups of society.
38. The Conference commended the major efforts made by Jordan in particular in terms of enrolment of Syrian refugees in education and reduction of barriers to health care access. The Conference welcomed Jordan's vision for economic transformation, growth and reform and reiterated the readiness of the international community to support its efforts to provide growth, jobs and services to Syrian refugees and vulnerable Jordanians. Given the broader impact of the Syrian crisis and the difficult economic circumstances facing Jordan, the Conference recommended further building on the vulnerability approach proposed by the Government in order to respond most effectively to people's essential needs.
39. The Conference recognised and appreciated Iraq's efforts in hosting and supporting Syrian refugees, mainly in its Kurdistan Region. Participants expressed their commitment to maintain a high level of support to Iraq in responding to the humanitarian needs resulting from years of conflict, widespread internal displacement and disrupted access to social services, as well as specifically from the Syrian conflict.
40. The Conference recognised and welcomed Egypt's important contribution in hosting Syrian refugees and the inclusive policies adopted by the Egyptian government in terms of health services, education and public services. The Conference also noted Egypt's ongoing efforts to strengthen its asylum system and protect the rights of Syrian refugees.

Accountability and justice

41. Conference participants expressed concern over the impunity for serious violations of international humanitarian law and violations and abuses of human rights law committed during the conflict in Syria and condemned them in the strongest possible way. They underscored the urgent need to ensure accountability for systematic violations and abuses, including the use of chemical weapons and blatant violations of international humanitarian and human rights law, such as crimes related to sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), enforced disappearances, arbitrary detention, torture, indiscriminate attacks against civilians and civilian infrastructure, some of which constitute war crimes and crimes against humanity. The fight against impunity is both a legal requirement and central to achieving sustainable peace and genuine reconciliation in Syria.
42. The co-chairs commended the important work of the Independent Commission of Inquiry (CoI) and the International Independent and Impartial Mechanism (IIIM). They reiterated their call for the situation in Syria to be referred to the International Criminal Court.
43. The co-chairs welcomed the findings of the Board of Inquiry into incidents in north-west Syria as communicated by the Secretary-General and participants expressed hope for the swift implementation of its recommendations. They also welcomed the release of the first report of the Investigation and Identification Team of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) for the consideration of the Executive Council of the OPCW and the Secretary-General of the United Nations and noted its conclusions with great concern. The co-chairs strongly condemned the use of chemical weapons by the Syrian Arab Air Force and reiterated that those identified as responsible for the use of chemical weapons must be held accountable for their reprehensible acts in breach of the Chemical Weapons Convention.

Future steps and concluding remarks

44. The Conference underlined the importance of continuing to work with and support Syria's civil society, welcoming efforts to go beyond emergency and life-saving responses and to also focus on early recovery, resilience and self-reliance needs of communities in Syria in order to preserve the country's social fabric.
45. The Conference reaffirmed the commitment from international donors to continue providing financial support for vulnerable communities affected by the Syrian conflict and to assist their resilience and capacity for recovery in the future, both inside Syria and in the region.
46. The EU will continue tracking financial commitments made during the Conference, working with the UN as was the case for previous Brussels Conferences, and reporting on progress made in Jordan and Lebanon on key mutual policy commitments from past conferences.
47. The United Nations, recalling the Secretary-General's global call for the waiver of sanctions that can undermine the capacity of countries to ensure access to food, essential health supplies and medical health support to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic, took note of assurances by relevant States and entities that their sanctions programmes relating to Syria neither banned the flow of humanitarian supplies nor targeted medicine and medical supplies. In this regard, the EU recalled that its sanctions applying to Syria are designed in accordance with international law and are implemented with a view to avoiding any negative impact on the delivery of humanitarian aid, including essential medical equipment and supplies necessary to fight the COVID-19 pandemic and limit its spread worldwide.
48. Donor countries and the EU reiterated that reconstruction and international support for its implementation will only be possible once a credible political solution, consistent with resolution 2254 (2015) and the Geneva Communiqué, is firmly underway. A successful reconstruction process also requires minimal conditions for stability and inclusiveness, a democratic and inclusive government guaranteeing people's safety and security, an agreed conflict-sensitive development strategy, reliable and legitimate interlocutors as well as guarantees in terms of funding accountability. None of these conditions are currently fulfilled in Syria.

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