Statement by Commissioner Christos Stylianides on World Food Programme funding shortages for Syria

Brussels, 8 December 2014

Christos Stylianides, European Commissioner for Humanitarian Aid and Crisis Management, made the following statement:

I am deeply concerned by the World Food Program's (WFP) suspension of food assistance for more than 1.7 million Syrian refugees in neighbouring countries, due to a dramatic shortage of funding. This cutting back in food assistance is a stark reminder of the overwhelming impact of this biggest humanitarian tragedy of our times, which has left almost 200,000 people dead and more than 12 million in need of urgent humanitarian assistance.

The European Union collectively has led the international response to the Syrian crisis advocating at all levels at Headquarters and in the field for large-scale and cost-effective international assistance and providing more than €3 billion to support. €666 million come from the European Commission's humanitarian budget, out of which €115 million were provided to WFP's operations in the region, making WFP our second-largest humanitarian partner, after the UNHCR.

The EU is deeply committed to this constructive partnership and is appalled by the sudden break in the WFP's pipeline of food and subsistence items especially at the onset of winter. We are pursuing all avenues to increase the mobilisation of resources. We will allocate immediately an additional amount of € 5.5 million in humanitarian funding to WFP, bringing our overall funding of WFP for Syria up to € 18 million in 2014. Together with funding for other partners in the region such as UNICEF, the International Red Cross, the UNHCR and numerous NGOs, we will disburse more than €155m this year. But clearly it is not sufficient. I am following closely the situation; currently I am travelling with my colleagues High-Representative/Vice-President Federica Mogherini and Commissioner Johannes Hahn to Turkey, where we will also have the opportunity to visit refugees from Syria.

It is a sad reality that humanitarian needs and the cost of humanitarian operations are increasing year by year and have created a dramatic shortfall between needs and available funds. While Syria is the biggest humanitarian tragedy we face today, the suffering generated by the conflicts in Iraq, Central African Republic and Ukraine, the crisis in South Sudan, not to mention the Ebola epidemic in West Africa all call on our solidarity. We are witnessing a perfect storm of humanitarian tragedies not seen since the second World War.

Humanitarian budgets are stretched beyond the limit and the EU budget is at a crunch point. I am convinced that the international donor community including the EU member states will step up to the challenge and mobilise funds for the victims of conflict and disasters. I moreover invite all donors and UN agencies to sit together for the 2015 planning to prevent such a shortfall happening again.

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