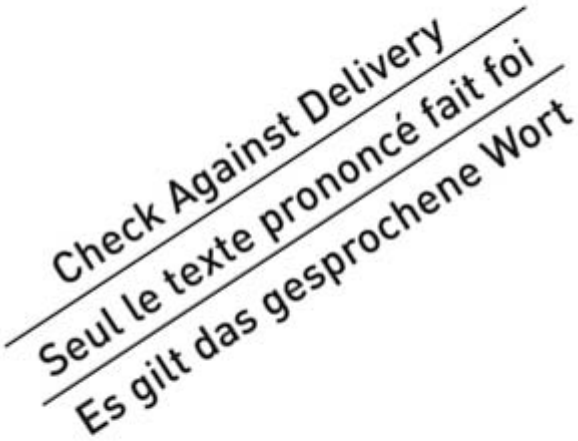
EUROPEAN COMMISSION

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A collective effort to support the victims of Syria's crisis – the European Union's humanitarian work



Kuwait pledging conference for the Syria crisis
Kuwait City ,30 January 2013

Spokespersons' Service
Service des Porte-parole

SPEECH/13/79

Exellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to thank you, Your Highness Amir SABAH al-Ahmad al-Jaber al-Sabah and Secretary-General BAN KI-Moon and, for bringing us here for the first humanitarian pledging conference for Syria, where - as we have just seen on the screen - the situation deteriorates by the day.

When I was in Lebanon last month, Ali, a six-year refugee from Syria, gave me a drawing of memories from his homeland – tanks, guns, blood and the death body of his cousin Abdullah. Every day the civil war in Syria produces more crushed lives and wounded souls, and with every victim the country is being torn apart. With no political solution in sight, I fear that for the Syrian people the worst is still to come. This is why it is crucial today for all of us who have the means to help to do our best, to give generously in support of the Syrian people.

When a crisis strikes, we in Europe are always firmly on the side of the most vulnerable people and this is where we have been in Syria since the civil war began last year. We have already provided (USD) $460 million – more than half of all humanitarian assistance - $134 million from the European Commission and $326 million from our member states. For the coming first months of 2013, we pledge additional $370 million - $136 million from the European Commission, and $234 million so far from our member states, with the most notable pledges coming from the UK, Italy, Sweden and Germany. This does not include other sources of funding such as economic support for countries in the region or special measures for Syrian civil society, which amounts to more than USD 240 million per year.

This money will help feed two million Syrians and will finance more medicines, clean water, shelter and protection for hundreds of thousands of people in dire need.

Together with our partners in the United Nations agencies, NGOs and relief organisations, we are delivering assistance to all areas of Syria, including those which are fiercely disputed. But access to people in need is uneven, and far too many children, women and men are left hungry, cold and fearful. To reach out to them, we must combine the money we give with relentless advocacy with all parties to the conflict in order to let humanitarian workers do their job.

Our chances of success greatly depend on our ability to avoid the politicisation of our humanitarian aid as any attempt to do so will make the task of reaching the people in need ever more difficult. Shooting at ambulances and relief convoys – already a bitter fact of life for humanitarians in Syria – will only get worse if relief actions are perceived by either side as being "with or against us".

To achieve this, we must persevere in providing assistance based on needs regardless of religious, political or other affiliations and also to insist on the respect for international humanitarian law by all parties. In a country where all laws are now broken we must strive to uphold and protect the most basic principles of humanity: failure to do so will mean that we will not reach the poorest and most vulnerable, wherever they are.

The emphasis on engaging inside Syria must not mean we neglect what is happening in neighbouring countries. On the contrary, the more we can do for people who want to stay in Syria, including for the Palestinians dragged into the conflict, the more we will reduce the burden on Syria's neighbours. We are immensely grateful for the hospitality they have shown and we hope that the borders can remain open.

While we can always improve what we are doing, I would like to use this occasion to express our full support to the United Nations and other partners' efforts in Syria. Let us not forget that 15 relief workers have been killed, including 8 UN staff. It is vital that the international community provides financial and political support for the UN coordinated humanitarian effort in Syria and in the region.

The European Union will stay engaged as long as needs exist and will continue to raise the funds necessary for this crucial aid. We will also persist in our call to all other members of the international community to do the same. It is only through our collective effort that we will be able to provide support for all those people tragically affected by this conflict.

Thank you!