



EUROPEAN COMMISSION

PRESS RELEASE

Brussels, 17 February 2014

EU to support the destruction of Syrian chemical stockpiles

The European Union announced today financial support of €12 million to help destroy Syrian chemical stockpiles, by contributing to a Trust Fund established by the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), recipient of the 2013 Nobel Peace Prize. The contribution was pledged by EU High Representative Catherine Ashton in December last year and become today a reality with the signing of the contract by EU Commissioner for Development Andris Piebalgs.

The use of chemical weapons in Syria in August 2013 was firmly condemned by the international community and a number of initiatives including the creation of such a Trust Fund were set out to respond to the challenge of destroying the chemical stockpiles, which started by the end of September last year.

The activities covered by this programme include the transport, treatment and disposal of the chemical materials and effluents outside Syria, and will be implemented jointly by the OPCW and the United Nations, in order to secure their safe and environmentally sound destruction.

Commissioner Piebalgs said: *"This is an unprecedented programme in terms of scale and timing in the history of chemical weapons destruction. The European Commission is looking forward to a fruitful cooperation with the OPCW and the UN on this matter and hoping that the destruction of chemical weapons will be a step closer to bringing an end to the conflict in Syria."*

High Representative Catherine Ashton said: *"I welcome the significant effort made by all concerned to ensure that the pledge made to the OPCW in December has been fulfilled. This is an important step, which complements the Geneva peace negotiations, since the OPCW track helps to build much-needed confidence. Our support for the destruction of Syrian chemical weapons demonstrates the EU's commitment to ensuring that these terrible weapons are not used again and to finding a peaceful and durable solution for the crisis in that country."*

Besides the funds announced today, the EU has also provided other technical and logistical support (e.g. providing armoured cars) totalling approximately 4.5 million euros. In addition, from 2004 until now the EU had provided general support to the OPCW of €9.4 million; bringing the total EU contribution to the OPCW to almost €26 million.

The estimated cost by the OPCW for this part of the programme is €25-30 million.

Background

The funds made available today have been provided under the Instrument for Stability (IfS), to ensure the definitive destruction of chemicals. Under the IfS, the EU is able to make the necessary funds available for the dismantlement of related facilities and sites where these are declared to be no longer part of defence programmes.

As part of this, the EU is active in the Middle East as a region with initiatives such as the establishment of a Centre of Excellence for CBRN (Chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear) Risk Mitigation. This program focuses on the provision of training on CBRN emergency response, strengthening of export control mechanism in dual-use goods and crisis response to new challenges in the area of public health.

Over the past decade, the EU has developed close relations with the OPCW. Since 2004, the EU has supported the organisation's activities in projects implemented worldwide. Activities include the promotion of the universality of the Chemical Weapons Convention along with its implementation at the national level, and international cooperation in the field of chemical activities, amongst others.

Overall, European Commission and EU Member States together have mobilised €2.6 billion development and humanitarian aid so far in response to Syrian crisis, making the EU the biggest donor. In 2013 alone, the Commission has provided €280 million in development assistance under the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI), €350 million in humanitarian relief, and €65 million under other aid instruments, which brings the amount of aid last year to almost €700 million.

For more information

Website of the European Commissioner for Development, Andris Piebalgs:

http://ec.europa.eu/commission_2010-2014/piebalgs/index_en.htm

Website of DG Development and Cooperation - EuropeAid – Instrument for Stability:

http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/how/finance/ifs_en.htm

Website of the EU Delegation to Syria

http://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/syria/index_en.htm

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