Foreign & Commonwealth Office (UK)

"My message to the Council today is that for Syria, for its people, for us all - time is now running out"

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Let me thank Stephen O'Brien, Zeinab Bangura and Leila Zerrougui for their sobering briefings. And indeed the UK expresses its condolences in relation to the terrorist attacks over recent days in Paris, Beirut and elsewhere. They are a vivid reminder of the horrific human toll of the Syria and regional crisis.

Like others here today, I've met Syrian refugees who have fled the bloodshed and violence consuming their country for over 4 years now. And their tales are of experiences that no one should have to go through.

But, we must accept that these people have been let down. The generosity of countries bearing the brunt of the refugees like Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey has not been matched by a similar generosity from the whole international community. UN appeals are 45% funded. Overwhelming suffering and loss has been matched by political deadlock and an inadequate financial response.

My message to the Council today is that for Syria, for its people, for us all - time is now running out.

Time is running out for us to meet the most basic needs of the Syrian people – whether they are inside Syria or have fled the country.

Time is running out for Syria's children. A whole generation who are being robbed of a childhood, an education and a future.

And time is running out for the international community, as we try to cope with the overwhelming numbers of refugees who have themselves run out of hope and are now looking elsewhere to build a new life for themselves and their families.

Since day one, Britain has worked hard to help people on the ground and been at the forefront of the humanitarian response to this crisis – pledging $1.7 billion to date.

But the need is immense and growing. Greater efforts are needed, not only to meet people's basic needs – but to provide jobs and an education for Syria's children.

That's why our Prime Minister has just announced that the UK will co-host a global conference on the Syria crisis in February next year. This conference must be a turning point. It must raise the resources and deliver the policy changes that are needed.

Let's not forget, our response to this crisis, the actions we take - or don't take - on Syria - will define how we respond to other protracted emergencies. The challenge of educating whole generations of children at risk of being lost to conflict. And, with forced displacement likely to remain a major feature of the global landscape, the challenge of supporting refugees and the countries that host them.

But we recognise that humanitarian action alone is not sufficient. Syria isn't a natural disaster, it's a man-made one.

We all know what's causing the deaths and suffering. The Assad regime bears the primary responsibility. It's Assad's barrel bombs… it's ISIL's brutality too. It's the targeting and the killing of aid workers. It's the deliberate disregard for international humanitarian law, too often dressed up in a false, perverse argument of sovereignty.

A negotiated political transition is the sole way to end the conflict in Syria and is key to alleviating the humanitarian crisis. I am encouraged by the constructive discussions in Vienna and the new momentum behind the process working towards peace for the people of Syria.

But until that political settlement is reached we must recommit to:

-ending targeted and indiscriminate attacks on civilians, particularly aerial attacks and shelling;

-to the protection of health facilities, schools and essential infrastructure;

ensuring unimpeded access for humanitarian organisations;

and an end to the use of siege tactics;

and preventing and responding to gender-based violence. As is the case in all conflicts, girls and women have been left the most vulnerable to violence, abuse and exploitation.

As we meet today, there are a long list of things that we will fail to agree on in relation to the Syria crisis. But help for those caught up in this crisis, humanitarian aid being able to reach those in need, these things shouldn't be on that list. These are things that we should be able to agree to.

There can be no excuse for flouting humanitarian law. There can be no excuse for preventing humanitarian agencies from reaching those in need. The Council must make that clear.

We agreed Resolution 2191 on allowing the UN to use cross-border routes. This resolution has been critical for helping us get aid to people who would otherwise have had none. It is essential that we renew that resolution.

Syria is perhaps the defining conflict of our age, not just for those in the region, but for all of us. It has shown all too clearly where there are failures in our humanitarian and political responses.

And the World Humanitarian Summit next year will be a vital moment for us to commit to a new 21st century response to a protracted crisis - that brings together our development, humanitarian work and human rights. And, in this age of crisis, this summit is a vital moment to recommit to our humanitarian values and law.

As the UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon and the International Committee of the Red Cross President Peter Maurer have said, now is the moment to rally for humanity.

We must respond to that call for the sake of Syria, and for the wider world, and for future generations. This is our shared responsibility and challenge – we must meet it. Thank you.

Source: https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/my-message-to-the-council-today-is-that-for-syria-for-its-people-for-us-all-time-is-now-running-out