Foreign & Commonwealth Office (UK)

Eastern Aleppo City is now encircled by the regime...300,000 people are now effectively besieged.

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Thank you Mr President for agreeing to hold this briefing in open session today. Enough is enough. We need to break with tradition and have this debate in public because it's vital that the world hears the reality of life in Syria, so thank you, Stephen, for your sobering briefing.

And it's also vital, Mr President, that the world hears each and every member of this Council respond to the horrors described today.

We cannot hide away behind closed doors; we cannot stay silent in the face of such barbarism… hundreds of civilians are being killed and injured in attacks from the air and ground …. hundreds of thousands more are now suffering in an ever expanding humanitarian crisis.

As we have just heard, eastern Aleppo City is now encircled by the regime. The Castello road, a vital route for food, medicine and supplies, is cut off. Three hundred thousand people are now effectively besieged. Yet another humanitarian catastrophe awaits.

We've seen this before. And we know what happens next. Only six months ago, we held an emergency briefing on the siege of Madaya. We all remember the pictures of emaciated children from that town… Children like Ola, only 12 years old, who died after the regime ignored requests to evacuate her. She starved to death. The Syrian American Medical Society report that 64 others suffered the same horrific fate.

Mr President, we owe it to Ola, to her family, to the people of Madaya, to stop history repeating itself in Aleppo. There are three hundred thousand reasons why we cannot afford to fail.

But we are running out of time. We welcome the foresight of the UN to preposition food supplies in the city, but these supplies will feed less than half the city, and only for a month. Food prices are soaring; the price of flour has doubled, the price of vegetables has tripled. And it is only going to get worse.

We all know what is needed; sustained, unhindered humanitarian deliveries. All of us here today – this Council, the UN, the world outside this chamber – we must keep pressing for this access, both for Aleppo and for all other destinations agreed in the July plan. We support

your call, Stephen, for a weekly 48 hour pause to allow aid into Aleppo. And I call on all other Council members to express their support today. We again call on Russia to use its influence on the regime, not just to reopen the Castello road and other routes, but also to respect fully the Cessation of Hostilities so that convoys can proceed securely and Syrians can live safely.

These are not unreasonable requests. These are not even new requests. And yet they have fallen on deaf ears, time after time, week after week. Without sustained, unhindered land access, we must continue to push for air access, and we look to the WFP and to the UN for an update on their plans to request approval for such delivery.

So far this month, only two besieged places have been reached by the UN. The Secretary-General's report explains that this is because of security concerns - no surprise given the Regime's military offensives - but also because of, and I quote, "administrative delays." I'm sorry but no person, no child should ever face starvation because of an administrative delay.

So this Council should be united in our condemnation of any efforts to delay or restrict access; as the Secretary-General's report makes clear, granting access should never be conditional nor dependent on political negotiations nor used as a bargaining chip in talks.

Mr President,

As crucial as humanitarian access is for the people of Aleppo, Madaya and so many other places in Syria, it will count for very little if the bombs keep falling. I was emailed recently by Dr Hatem, a Syrian paediatrician who I've quoted in this chamber before. He told me, and I quote "There are close to 90,000 children in [Aleppo]. In front of each of them now lies the siege, above them the threat of bombs", end quote.

What good is it to feed, to clothe, to heal someone, only for them to die under the rubble of a bomb blast?

In Darayya, over 700 barrel bombs fell in less than three weeks. That's on average a bomb every 40 minutes for 20 days.

In Aleppo City, only this weekend, six medical facilities were attacked within the space of 24 hours. The only paediatric facility in east Aleppo was hit twice within 12 hours.

These are just a handful of examples; there are many, many more. Such attacks are unconscionable, they are unjustifiable. And yet they are common place. Asad's consistent disregard for the Cessation of Hostilities is an affront to this Security Council, and to the ISSG.

So in the coming weeks and days, it isn't enough to grant unhindered access to all besieged areas, it isn't enough to unblock the Castello Road. We need to see all of that and more;

including a genuine recommitment to the cessation of hostilities, an end to the bombing of medical facilities and an end to attacks on civilians.

This is the only way to save the people of Aleppo, and the people of Syria. As Dr Yahya of the Aleppo Children's Hospital told me by email earlier today, "if nothing is done, we are surely facing death."

Thank you Mr President.

Source: https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/eastern-aleppo-city-is-now-encircled-by-the-regime300000-people-are-now-effectively-besieged