EUROPEAN COMMISSION

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"We must put the people of Syria first"

Speech at the Kuwait pledging conference for the Syria crisis
Kuwait, 15 January 2014

Your Highness,

Your Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to thank His Highness Emir SABAH Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and UN Secretary-General BAN KI-Moon for bringing us to Kuwait for the second humanitarian pledging conference for Syria.

Since we met last year the Syria crisis has deepened and the needs continued to grow. In response, the European Commission has delivered seven times more what we have pledged, providing one billion dollar against our original pledge of nearly a hundred and forty million dollars.

And as the nature of the humanitarian crisis changed to become a protracted regional crisis we adapted our response to reflect those changing needs adopting a comprehensive approach.

Today on behalf of the European Commission I pledge $225 million (€165 million). You have already heard the generous pledges of five of our EU member states. In addition, another eighteen member states are joining our collective effort to bring relief to the Syrian people. Taken together, the EU pledge, the Commission and its member states, totals $753 million. This brings our funding to $3.5 billion since the beginning of the crisis. These funds will provide food and clean water, medicines and shelter to the Syrians and their host communities who most urgently need humanitarian assistance.

Every family affected by this terrible crisis, every life crushed by its consequences is a tragic loss. But this tragedy is magnified when we consider its impact on the lives of children, who are the future of Syria when this madness finally ends – as we all know it must and will in a negotiated political settlement. That is why we strongly support the No Lost Generation initiative which aims to protect the youth of Syria and provide the education they need to rebuild their country.

We are here today to raise money for the greatest humanitarian crisis of modern times. But money means nothing to the Syrians trapped behind the front-lines, barely able to live under siege and in constant fear and hunger. It is paramount that we implement in full the UN Security Council Presidential Statement, notably on protection of hospitals and schools as well as the safety of humanitarian aid workers – too many of whom have lost their lives in the service of saving the lives of others. It is paramount to have more access to people inside Syria.

We have to use every possible means to ensure that aid gets through to where it is needed. This is a vital element of the political talks known as Geneva II commencing next week. Progress on the issue of humanitarian aid can be a confidence-building measure on the road to a full settlement.

But let us all agree and send the message loud and clear from this hall today – humanitarian aid must not be held hostage by the political and military tactics of parties to this conflict. We must put the people of Syria first.

Together with our financial pledges today, we must send a message to those who fight – do not hold humanitarian aid hostage of political and military tactics, spare the innocent civilians and the aid workers who are there to help them.

Thank you.