Foreign & Commonwealth Office (UK)

# "The Syrian Regime are using starve or surrender tactics. That is abhorrent and a clear breach of International Humanitarian Law."

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Thank you Madam President and thank you also to you, Stephen, for your important briefing today and indeed for all your sterling work.

I want to begin as you did Stephen by wholeheartedly condemning the terrorist attack on desperate civilians as they were being evacuated as part of the Four Towns agreement. It is utterly tragic that over 120 people, including a very high number of children, were brutally killed. The United Kingdom condemns this terrible attack. We will work to ensure that whoever is responsible is held to account. I wish also to salute the unity and bravery of the humanitarian response including the response of the White Helmets.

Despite a ceasefire being in place since the end of 2016, we continue to witness terrible ongoing violence. In April alone, we know that the Regime or its allies have carried out aerial attacks on at least six hospitals and three schools in Syria. Six hospitals. Three schools. This is utterly deplorable. I hope others will join me in condemning all such incidents. All of us need to do everything in our power to bring the suffering to an end. And so I ask my Russian colleague, what is Russia doing with its leverage to ensure the Regime stops attacking schools and hospitals?

These attacks once again bring into laser focus the urgent and desperate humanitarian needs of 13 million people in Syria. I am especially concerned by the difficulty in reaching the 1.5 million people who live under siege-like conditions and a further 3.2 million in other hard to reach areas in Syria. All of them urgently require food, water, and medicine.

Roughly 5 million Syrians live in besieged and hard-to-reach areas, but the only regime-besieged area to be reached in 2017 was Khan al Shieh, where 6,000 people were reached with aid. The other besieged areas reached are Deir Ez Zour, besieged by Daesh, where the UN carries out air drops; and the Four Towns, besieged by the Iranian-backed Hizballah and armed opposition groups. This is a tiny proportion of aid reaching those people who are in most need of it.

Let me be clear. The Syrian Regime are using starve or surrender tactics. That is abhorrent and a clear breach of International Humanitarian Law.

I am especially concerned about the 420,000 innocent civilians in the besieged part of Eastern Ghouta, where supplies are rapidly running out. There are urgent medical needs, shortages of basic food items, and no water or power supplies.

I fully support Stephen's call for a pause in fighting to allow the UN and its humanitarian partners to safely enter Eastern

Ghouta.

At the International Syria Support Group meeting in Geneva on 20 April, Russia committed to press the Regime to allow the UN and its humanitarian partners to access Douma, one part of Eastern Ghouta. What is the situation one week later? The Regime has not acted. There is still no convoy. We owe it to the people of Douma to do everything we can to improve this situation.

The UN has received the requisite assurances from the relevant armed opposition groups to allow them to deliver assistance to Douma, and it has identified a safe route to enter. The only things now lacking are for the Assad regime to issue a facilitation letter and to pause its aerial bombardment of the area for long enough for the UN and its humanitarian partners to enter.

If Russia is unable to ensure that the regime allows access, we call on the Security Council to act to ensure the UN is able to deliver urgent supplies to Douma in the first instance.

Madam President, I will reiterate now what I have said many times before, there can be no sustainable peace until there is a political transition. The Asad regime bears overwhelming responsibility for the suffering of the Syrian people. I implore the whole of the Security Council to work in unity to end the conflict for the sake of the Syrian people.

Thank you.

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Source: https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/the-syrian-regime-are-using-starve-or-surrender-tactics-that-is-abhorrent-and-a-clear-breach-of-international-humanitarian-law