European Commission - Speech

Remarks at the opening of the "Syria Exhibition" (Brussels)

Brussels, 23 April 2018

Check Against Delivery

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Dear friends,

Seven years have passed since the beginning of the conflict in Syria.

Seven years of endless **violence**.

Seven years of **suffering**. With millions of **disrupted lives**.

This is the devastating reality for over **thirteen million people.** Since the beginning of the conflict. Thousands of children are born amid conflict knowing nothing but shelling and ruins.

Civilians are the main victims of this conflict. Mostly **women and children**.

- They experience constant **distress**.

- They are in desperate need for **life-saving assistance and protection**.

- They are denied their basic **rights** to shelter, health and education.

- Deprived of their fundamental **freedom of movement**.

- Exposed to all sorts of **violence and abuse**.

Around you there are pictures of war. But most importantly, there are also pictures of **hope**.

These photos show how people caught by the conflict manage to get through. Heal their wounds. And hope for a better future.

This has been one of the main **priorities** of the EU since the beginning of the conflict in Syria.

To **alleviate the suffering** of civilians affected by the conflict.

To **reach** as many people as possible.

Through an extended partnership of dedicated and committed UN Agencies.

The International Committee of the Red Cross.

And international and local civil society organisations.

That operate with **determination** and **courage** in extremely dangerous contexts.

The European Union is the top donor of assistance for the Syria crisis. By allocating more than **10.6 billion euro** since 2011**.** For humanitarian, stabilisation and resilience assistance to Syrians. Inside the country. And in neighbouring countries.

In **Turkey,** with **3.7 million** refugees, is now the country with the highest number of refugees in the world.

In **Lebanon**, which hosts **one million** of refugees. And which has the highest concentration of refugees per capita in the world. Roughly 40 percent of its population.

Jordan, home to one of the largest refugee camps in the world with more than **80 thousand** refugees, has been transformed into an expanding city.

Finally, many of these courageous people still live **inside** Syria. In besieged or hard-to-reach areas.

The opening of this exhibition is taking place one day before the **Second Brussels Conference on Syria**. This Conference is bringing together all our partners that work to put an end to this terrible conflict.

Let me specifically thank our partners, who contributed with their photos to this exhibition: ICRC, UNHCR, WFP, UNICEF and GVC.

Dear friends,

These photos around us tell us **stories**.

The story of **Yaser from Aleppo**, who stayed in his hometown *"stuck between a rock and a hard place"*, as he said.

The story of the **5 year old Rowaidah**, who finally got his vaccine against polio thanks to the EU-supported immunization campaign in Syria.

Finally, the story of **Huda, 35 year old** refugee single mother in Gaziantep, Turkey. Who can now buy food for her children at the supermarket. Thanks to the Emergency Social Safety Net. The largest EU humanitarian relief programme ever.

This exhibition is full of stories.

Stories of people who are determined to reclaim their disrupted lives.

The EU stands by these people, helping them rebuild their lives. **Through protection. Food. Education. Shelter. Health. Psychosocial support.** Through this assistance, we become a constructive part of their lives.

These images contain thousands of untold stories.

Let's take a moment to listen to them.

Thank you.

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