

Humanitarian workers in Syria deserve our efforts to protect them

 [gov.uk/government/speeches/humanitarian-workers-in-syria-deserve-our-efforts-to-protect-them](https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/humanitarian-workers-in-syria-deserve-our-efforts-to-protect-them)

Location:

New York

Delivered on:

24 June 2019 (Transcript of the speech, exactly as it was delivered)



Thank you very much, Mr President, and thank you to our briefers. I think David Lillie you are right to challenge us. Humanitarian workers deserve our praise and our thanks and admiration. But above all, they deserve our efforts: the efforts of this Council to protect them. And I am sorry that that has been found wanting. And I'll come on to that in a minute.

Mr President, I wanted first just to support the French and German representatives on what they said at the start before the debate began. We believe it's important for the Council to hear from all sides of a conflict so we didn't on this occasion object to the invitation issued under Rule 39 to the Russian Reconciliation Centre and to General Bakin. We are very strong supporters of freedom of speech but we prefer it to be truthful speech, Mr President. And we believe that truth is indeed the first casualty of war; that's a

very good saying. And I don't like being told that we can't trust UN information, or we can't trust the assessment of this Council and instead, we are to trust Russian uniformed personnel, even though Russia is a party to the conflict.

Mr President, it is obvious that there is also a conflict of interest. So I just wanted to explain all that before I go on to the substance. Our agreement to hear briefers from one side of a conflict - military briefers - in a humanitarian context shouldn't be taken for granted in future for the reasons I've set out.

I'd like though today, Mr President, to particularly focus on the hospitals, on the issues that Mark Lowcock raised and on deconfliction. And I really want to try to get to the bottom of this. I said last time that I keep asking questions until we got answers. And General, I hope very much that you will be able to help the Council get answers with the problems it has with the attacks on the hospitals, because these are very serious matters that we just don't seem to get any progress on.

So if I may, Sir, I'd like to ask you some questions;

I'd like to know why 30 hospitals have been attacked?

Why the ambulance was a direct target.

And I'd like to know why, given what we've heard from David Lillie, and what we've heard from the Under-Secretary General for Humanitarian Affairs, and what we know of international humanitarian law; why do you believe that the attacks on the terrorist eclipse the needs of civilians? Because to us, they don't look proportionate and they don't look like they're preserving the principles of IHL.

And if you believe that the hospitals are legitimate military targets, then I think we would like to see some of the information that underpins that belief.

And in particular, we would like to know where are the warnings that under the Geneva Conventions need to be given before a hospital can be treated as a military target?

I'd like to know how you see, or how Russia sees, the de-confliction mechanism working for the reasons the Under-Secretary-General set out.

I have three more questions, if I may Sir?

One is about the ceasefire; why is it so difficult, given that both you and we support the Turkish efforts in Idlib? Why is it so difficult to get a cease fire? And what needs to change on the ground in order to get a cease fire?

What is happening to investigate and to hold accountable the people responsible for the attacks on hospitals?

And finally General, please may we have the names and designations of the Russian and Syrian units involved in the attacks on the hospitals?

Mr President, I have points also to make on Rukban where I share colleagues concern about the deteriorating situation and humanitarian access. We too support the need for a third aid-convoy to be allowed in as a matter of urgency. We support unfettered access for aid across Syria.

And in respect of Al-Hol, we continue to support the UN's efforts to scale up its response and we continue to provide aid to humanitarian organizations operating in IDP camps, including Al-Hol.

A number of speakers have raised the political situation, Mr President. And as a number have noted, Mr Pedersen will brief us later this month. I'm just going to refer to what the French representative said, and say that that represents the United Kingdom's view also, as does his statement on the use of chemical weapons.

Thank you, Mr President.

Published 26 June 2019