Foreign & Commonwealth Office (UK)

UK training for Syrian activists to save lives

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In the last few months, participants in a UK-funded search and rescue ‘civil defence’ course in Istanbul have included an English literature student, a fruit wholesaler, an engineer and a dentist. The course offers hands-on training to give volunteer activists the skills they need to help save civilian lives in Syria, devastated by more than two years of conflict.

Participants, who train as a team for their local area, will learn how to put out fires and the right techniques to rescue people from collapsed buildings, as well as provide first aid. The courses have trained teams from three towns in northern Syria which have come under heavy air and artillery bombardment.

The UK is also providing search and rescue equipment, including cutting tools, generators, lighting and communication equipment for use in these areas.

A course participant said:

“The course is useful for teams who work in civil defence and rescuing civilians in Syria, who are suffering because of the shelling by Assad’s forces.”

The UK has run three courses for 75 participants, organized in coordination with the Syrian National Coalition’s Assistance Coordination Unit (ACU). The courses were run by the Turkish Search and Rescue NGO, AKUT, at their specially constructed training site in Istanbul.

Separately to this programme, the UK has also committed £348 million in humanitarian aid funding to help those affected by the conflict, the UK’s largest ever response to a humanitarian crisis.

It will provide support including food, medical care and relief items for over a million people including those affected by the fighting in Syria and to refugees in Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey and Iraq.

Syrian search and rescue training

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