

Donors pledge \$6 billion to help support future of war-torn Syria at UN-backed conference

5 April 2017 – Forty-one donors today pledged a combined \$6 billion for critical humanitarian programmes in 2017 and another \$3.7 billion for 2018 for the people of Syria reeling under a devastating conflict since 2011 at a United Nations-supported conference in the Belgian capital, Brussels.

Earlier in the day, UN [Secretary-General](#) António Guterres drew attention the [plight of those suffering](#) as a result of the conflict in the war-ravaged country and urged the international community to increase support for both people within Syria as well as for the millions seeking refuge beyond its borders and for the communities hosting them.

“The need for humanitarian aid and the protection of Syrian civilians has never been greater [and] the humanitarian appeal for a single crisis has never been higher,” UN Secretary-General António Guterres said at the opening session of the Brussels Conference on Supporting the Future of Syria and the Region.

“UN agencies and our partners are determined to reach everyone in need, through all possible means,” he emphasized.

The [pledges made today](#) will support humanitarian relief, protection and resilience-building for people in need. It will also help the war-torn country’s neighbours shoulder the heavy burden from the spill-over effects of the crisis.

In its seventh year now, the conflict in [Syria](#) is the largest humanitarian challenge in the world – 13.5 million men, women and children inside the country are in need of urgent assistance and there are now more than five million Syrian refugees in Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey. Many more have made dangerous journey to Europe and farther afield.

UN-coordinated response plans for Syria and the region require a total of \$8 billion for 2017 alone, and the funding will contribute to UN and its partners efforts to reach some 12.8 million people this year.

The conference – co-chaired by UN, the European Union (EU), Germany, Kuwait, Norway, Qatar and the United Kingdom – started yesterday with thematic sessions on the humanitarian needs and challenges within the country and on ways to [strengthen resilience](#) of refugees and host communities in the context of the crisis.

VIDEO: Speaking to reporters in Brussels, UN chief Guterres underscored the importance of the conference.

No one is winning, everybody is losing – UN chief Guterres

In his [opening remarks](#), UN Secretary-General António Guterres highlighted that as the conflict in Syria grinded on, it continued to extract a harrowing toll on civilians.

“Nobody is winning this war. Everybody is losing,” he said.

Hundreds of thousands of men, women and children remain in siege-like conditions, beyond the reach of humanitarian assistance and “persistent” violations of international humanitarian law remains a reality in the country, added Mr. Guterres, noting: “as yesterday's reports of use of chemical weapons reminded us again”.

Hailing the countries hosting Syrian refugees, the UN chief also underlined the importance of building the resilience of host communities and to provide them with the support they need.

“But we also must step up international budget,” he added, noting that funding remains “utterly insufficient”.

He also urged developed countries, in particular, not to close borders or reduce resettlement and relocation opportunities and called on the international community to protect the integrity of the international refugee protection regime and emphasized that the world must share responsibility for Syrian refugees more equitably.

“This conference must represent a moment of truth, when the international community takes decisive steps to increase its support for the victims of the Syria conflict, and for the neighbouring countries that are providing a safe haven for millions of refugees,” underscored the Secretary-General.



A UN convoy drives past destroyed buildings in the old city of Homs, Syria. March 2017. Photo: UNICEF/Ebo

As soon as possible, pledges must be turned into action – UN aid chief

[Welcoming the pledges](#) received today, Stephen O'Brien, the UN Emergency Relief Coordinator, said that the international solidarity could not have come sooner.

“Today has been a momentous opportunity for much of the world to come together to commit more support and solidarity for Syrians and those affected across the region,” he said.

UN and partners have already been providing live-saving and life-sustaining food, water, medical care and shelter across the country. However, lack of humanitarian access, particularly to over 4.7 million people in besieged and hard to reach areas within the country remains a major obstacle for aid

delivery.

“We have today heard commitments from a wide range of countries to continue to resource principled humanitarian action through regular programmes, across conflict lines, across borders, and via air operations,” added Mr. O’Brien, calling on countries to translate the pledges into actual funds.

“We now need, as soon as possible, to see these pledges turned into cash for action.”

We must send a message to the Syrian people that they are not forgotten UN envoy

Also today, Staffan De Mistura, the UN Special Envoy for Syria and the mediator for [intra-Syrian talks](#), who was also at the Brussels Conference, stressed the importance to sustain the momentum on Syria.

“Bottom line: we need to send a constant, strong message, not to ourselves but to the Syrian people that they will not become a forgotten war,” he stated.

“They need to hear that [...] they can still count on us and hope is not given up. And I think this event, this important conference, is in this direction.”

Chemical attack, if confirmed, would be largest in Syria, UN Security Council told

5 April 2017 – Briefing an [emergency meeting](#) of the Security Council following the reports of alleged chemical weapons use in Khan Shaykhun, southern rural Idlib, Syria, a senior United Nations official for disarmament affairs said that while many details are not yet fully known, new information continues to come in on the incident.

“[However,] if confirmed, this would constitute the single largest chemical weapons attack in Syria since the [attack on eastern Ghouta](#) in August 2013,” said Kim Won-soo, the UN High Representative for Disarmament Affairs

“Reports have stated that the attack was carried out through an airstrike on a residential area [but] the means of delivery of the alleged attack cannot be definitively confirmed, at this stage,” he noted.

In his briefing, Mr. Kim informed the 15-member Council of reports indicating

presentation of symptoms after the attack, including respiratory problems, vomiting, fainting and foaming at the mouth, and miosis (pupillary constriction).

This was visible in videos on social media, said to have been taken at the scene of the attack, he noted.

According to the UN World Health Organization ([WHO](#)) at least [70 people have died and hundreds more have been affected](#) in Khan Shaykhun.

In a statement, WHO noted that : The likelihood of exposure to a chemical attack is amplified by an apparent lack of external injuries reported in cases showing a rapid onset of similar symptoms, including acute respiratory distress as the main cause of death.

Some cases appear to show additional signs consistent with exposure to organophosphorus chemicals, a category of chemicals that includes nerve agents, it added.

The statement also noted that emergency rooms and intensive care units in Idlib are overwhelmed and reporting shortages in medicines required to treat injured patients and that many patients have been referred to hospitals in southern Turkey.

SEE RELATED: [‘Clear and convincing’ evidence of chemical weapons use in Ghouta in August 2013](#)

Also in his briefing, the UN High Representative informed the meeting on the work of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) Fact Finding Mission (FFM) and the Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM).

Yesterday, the UN Secretary-General as well as officials from the OPCW and the [Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Syria expressed grave concern](#) over the reports and reiterated their condemnation of any chemical weapons use.

[Humanitarian needs have never been greater in Syria, says UN chief Guterres at international conference](#)

5 April 2017 – Speaking at a major international conference on Syria, United Nations [Secretary-General](#) António Guterres called on the international community to increase support for the victims of the conflict in the war-ravaged country as well as for the neighbouring ones that are sheltering millions of refugees.

The need for humanitarian aid and the protection of Syrian civilians has never been greater [and] the humanitarian appeal for a single crisis has never been higher," said Mr. Guterres at the *Brussels Conference on Supporting the Future of Syria and the Region*.

UN agencies and our partners are determined to reach everyone in need, through all possible means," he underscored.

The two-day conference started yesterday with thematic sessions on the humanitarian needs and challenges within the country and on ways to [strengthen resilience](#) of refugees and host communities in the context of the crisis.

It will also assess the status of implementation of commitments made at a conference in London last year as well as identify additional support to Syrians inside the country and in the neighbouring ones, as well as to the respective host communities.

In its seventh year, the conflict in Syria remains the largest humanitarian challenge in the world with 13.5 million men, women and children inside Syria in need of urgent assistance. There are now more than 5 million Syrian refugees living in Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey, and many more have made the dangerous journey to Europe and farther afield.

More to follow...

[Recent attacks show pirates off Somalia's coast still a potent threat – UN agency](#)

4 April 2017 – Noting that recent attacks on commercial ships off the coast of Somalia highlight the continued threat of piracy, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime ([UNODC](#)) has urged ships to follow advice of navies and that of the International Maritime Organization while planning passage through the region.

"After three attacks, following a lull of five years, it is clear that Somali pirates are resurgent and intent on continuing attacks on commercial shipping," said UNODC Executive Director, Yury Fedotov, in a [news release](#) today.

"I urge the international community to be vigilant, to work in close partnership and to hold the Somali pirates accountable," he added.

Over the course of last month, Motor Tanker (a merchant ship designed for the

bulk transport of oil) *Aris 13*, fishing vessel *Asayr 2* and cargo ship *Al Kaushar* were attacked by Somali pirates. While the crews of *Aris 13*, and *Asayr 2* were released, *Al Kaushar's* crew are reportedly still held hostage by the pirates.

According to UNODC, large parts of the Somali coast remain beyond the reach of law enforcement authorities and thus called on ships planning passage off the country to follow the advice of navies and the International Maritime Organization ([IMO](#)).

The UN agency added that it continued to support the trials of piracy suspects in the region and to the Somali maritime law enforcement agencies as they extend their reach around the Somali coast.

"The threat of Somali piracy has never gone away: it has been suppressed by the good work of the shipping industry and their security teams, navies, and UNODC's support to the trial and imprisonment of 1,300 pirates," expressed Alan Cole, the head of Maritime Crime Programme at UNODC.

Central African Republic: Security Council pledges support for President's efforts to stabilize country

4 April 2017 – The United Nations Security Council today expressed its support for the efforts of President Faustin Archange Touadera of the Central African Republic (CAR) to restore State authority as well as for the African Union-led mediation initiative to find a political solution to the situation in the crisis-torn country.

In a [Presidential Statement](#) issued today, the 15-member body renewed its support for CAR President Touadera and welcomed his significant role to stabilize the country, promote peace and reconciliation, advance plans for disarmament, enable long-term development, and build the capacity of state institutions and basic service delivery, with the support of regional and international partners.

The Council also acknowledges the African Initiative for a Peace and Reconciliation Agreement between the Government and all armed groups in the CAR, which is aimed at sustainably promoting reconciliation and inclusive governance.

On the security front, the Council expressed concern at the ongoing clashes between armed groups, in particular around Bambari in the Ouaka prefecture,

and, most recently, in Bakouma in the Mbomou prefecture, which have caused heavy civilian losses and significant population displacement.

The Council strongly condemned violence perpetrated by armed groups and their attempts to forcefully gain control of territory and resources, and urged all armed groups, in particular FPRC and UPC, to immediately stop all violence and honour their commitment to the disarmament, demobilization, reintegration and repatriation process.

The Council also renewed its support to the Secretary-General's Special Representative Parfait Onanga-Anyanga and to the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic ([MINUSCA](#)) in the implementation of its mandate.

Recalling the UN's zero tolerance policy on sexual exploitation and abuse, the Council urged all authorized non-UN forces to take adequate measures to prevent and combat impunity for sexual exploitation and abuse by their personnel.