

Our commitment to the Syrian people and the aid community

The UK remains deeply concerned that COVID-19 continues to compound the humanitarian crisis across Syria and, as I mentioned before, we're doing what we can to support and we provided \$30 million to tackle the threat of COVID-19 in Syria. That's alongside almost \$400 million this year in humanitarian support.

This support is a clear demonstration of our commitment to the Syrian people, but also to the aid community. And that commitment remains unwavering. And I want to in particular, as others have, express our steadfast support to OCHA and the World Health Organisation, both of whom are playing critical roles in the coordination of the humanitarian and the health response in Syria.

And this support is all the more important as aid workers continue to work in incredibly challenging circumstances, dealing with obstructions to their vital work and threats to their health and to their safety now on a daily basis.

In particular, I want to condemn the attack against the Turkish Red Crescent in Al Bab on Monday, which resulted in the death of an aid worker and the wounding of another. The deliberate targeting of aid workers is a clear violation of international humanitarian law, and such attacks are abhorrent. We call on all parties in Syria to uphold their obligations.

We also remain concerned about the lack of adequate PPE and medical equipment, and the continued rise in cases of COVID-19 among U.N. staff and aid workers.

This increased pressure on aid workers comes against the backdrop of devastating reports of avoidable civilian deaths, which further add to the humanitarian caseload. As we heard from USG Lowcock, the combination of the devastated health system and the challenges of COVID-19 can result in many more unnecessary deaths and illness. We were also deeply saddened to hear of the 11 deaths as a result of the car bomb in Afrin. It's unacceptable that pro-regime forces continue to launch indiscriminate attacks, which result in the death of civilians.

As the Commission of Inquiry makes clear again this week in their latest report, these attacks may amount to war crimes. Indeed, that report further shines a light on the brutal crimes against humanity that the regime continues to commit through enforced disappearance, murder, torture, and imprisonment. If we ever needed evidence that this is a regime that does not have the best interests of its people at heart, then this is it.

As we also heard today, access problems persist in North East Syria with a continued lack of cross-line access into the regions where vulnerable people need it most, and it was striking to hear the example from USG Lowcock of al

Tabqa. This is especially galling – 100 aid trucks being delayed from crossing into North East Syria because of bureaucratic procedures. This is another sign that despite the assurances of the allies of the Syrian regime in this Council that we could make cross-line access work, obstruction just continues. And the obstruction, let's be clear, is calculated. It's also unacceptable. The UN must be given unfettered access and must be allowed to deliver aid to those who need it most.

As others have said, we also remain concerned by persistent water and electricity shortages and disruptions to supply around the Alouk water station. We urge all parties to take steps to swiftly resolve water supply disruptions and to deconflict and minimize further conflict-related damage to civilian infrastructure.

At the last Council session, we talked about the 9.3 million people who are currently food insecure. Fires have since then ripped through North West Syria. And given that October and November are the sowing seasons for wheat and barley, and with the fires destroying large swathes of arable land, there is a risk now of devastating famine and further impacts on people's livelihoods. So, the picture is bleak.

It is vital that the Council comes together to prevent a worsening of the humanitarian disaster as we approach the winter months in Syria. As a priority, civilians and aid workers need to be urgently given the access and tools they need to alleviate suffering while there is still time to prepare for the coming months ahead.

Finally, I'm glad Christoph raised the ongoing trial in Germany. The reality is that the testimony there represents the tip of the iceberg. The Syrian regime, as we know, is willing indiscriminately to bomb innocent civilians in schools and hospitals. So one can only imagine what they are capable of in Assad's dungeons.

Before supporters of this regime raise the question of sanctions and the lifting of sanctions, let us again reiterate that the path to the removal of sanctions is clear. Rather than interfering with aid, bombing schools and hospitals, detaining and torturing people, the Syrian regime must heed the calls of its population and engage seriously with Special Envoy Pedersen and the UN-led political process to achieve a peaceful end to this conflict.

Thank you, Mr President.