

Press release: Penny Mordaunt announces UK aid commitment to protect civilians, aid workers and hospitals targeted by the Asad regime

Women and children are evacuated from eastern Ghouta, Syria, March 2018.
Picture: UNICEF/Omar Sanadiki

The UK will provide lifesaving emergency medical support and help protect medical facilities and brave humanitarian workers that are being deliberately targeted with bombs and chemical weapons by the Asad regime, the International Development Secretary Penny Mordaunt will say in Brussels today (Wednesday 25 April).

UK aid will help to train thousands of doctors and nurses to deliver trauma care in the most extreme conflict zones and to immediately respond to attacks, including how to remove shrapnel and treat blast injuries, burns and wounds from mortar fire. It will also provide essential medical supplies such as sutures, oxygen, blood and anaesthetics.

UK support aims to keep medical facilities open and we are providing blast proofing materials and sandbags to reinforce underground medical facilities and limit the damage from attacks.

Ms Mordaunt announced that the UK will provide at least £450 million this year to alleviate the extreme suffering in Syria, as well as providing vital support to millions of Syrian refugees sheltering in neighbouring countries.

With at least 30,000 people currently injured every month in Syria, it is expected that around a quarter of this UK aid support in Syria will be spent on healthcare next year.

Speaking at the Brussels conference on 'Supporting the Future of Syria and the region', Ms Mordaunt is expected to say:

It is clear the Syrian Regime and its backers, Russia and Iran, will attempt to block every diplomatic effort to hold the regime accountable for these reprehensible and illegal tactics.

Syria is now one of the most dangerous places on earth for aid workers and medical staff. Medical facilities and schools have been deliberately targeted, aid has been blocked to starve communities into submission, and rape and sexual violence have been deployed as routine weapons of war.

Today's pledge of UK aid support will help keep medical facilities

open in the face of relentless attacks so doctors and nurses can save the lives of innocent Syrians, as well as helping the millions of Syrian refugees sheltering in neighbouring countries. But today can't only be about pledges of money and we cannot allow anyone to turn their backs on the global rules and standards that keep us all safe.

We're calling for an immediate ceasefire and safe access so that brave aid workers and medical staff can do their jobs without fear of attack. This year, we must go beyond commitments. We must see concrete actions, which lead to greater protection for civilians and aid workers and work together to put Syria on a path towards peace.

It is estimated that at least 478 health facilities have been attacked or destroyed and at least 830 health workers have been killed in Syria since the conflict began in 2011.

There has been an increase in the number of health facilities in Syria targeted in the first months of 2018, with 36 facilities attacked in February alone.

Last year UK aid supported more than 175 health facilities, with more than 11,000 trained healthcare workers that delivered 2.2 million consultations.

On top of this, UK support has provided specialist training and equipment to respond to chemical weapons attacks, as well as providing personal protective equipment for frontline aid workers and 20,000 ampules of antidote to treat the effects of some chemical agents.

The UK will continue to use our position as a permanent member of the UN Security Council and on the Human Rights Council to support resolutions that seek to protect civilians and humanitarian workers, as well as calling for existing resolutions to be observed by the regime and its backers.

With 5.6 million Syrian refugees sheltering in neighbouring countries, the UK aid commitment announced today will also provide support in Jordan and Lebanon so that Syrian refugees can remain close to home until they are one day able to return safely. On top of this, the UK will provide additional support for refugees in Turkey.

Notes for Editors

1. The International Development Secretary has committed to provide at least £450 million for Syria and the region in 2018 and £300 million in 2019. This brings the total amount that the UK has committed in humanitarian funding to the Syria region to £2.71 billion, up from £2.46 billion. The UK's pledge for 2018 includes £200 million of new money for the crisis, and our pledge for 2019 includes £50 million of new money.

2. In addition, the International Development Secretary also confirmed that the UK will pay its part of the second round of the EU Facility for Refugees in Turkey (FRIT2).
3. The UK is a leading donor in the humanitarian response. To date, we have committed over £2.71 billion in humanitarian funding to the region.
4. UK aid has already delivered over 27 million food rations, 10 million relief packages, 10 million vaccines and 12 million health consultations for those in need in Syria.
5. For security reasons, we cannot disclose the specific areas that our partners work in.
6. For more information on the UK's humanitarian response to the Syria crisis, visit:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/factsheet-the-uks-humanitarian-aid-response-to-the-syria-crisis>

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