

Speech: Penny Mordaunt: Supporting the Future of Syria and the Region

Thank you. And I would like to thank the European Union and the United Nations for hosting today's conference and for being here at this crucial time for the Syrian people.

This time last year my colleague, the Foreign Secretary, began his address by condemning a horrific chemical weapons attack on innocent civilians in Syria.

Today, I must once again begin by condemning another barbaric chemical weapons attack on innocent civilians, including young children, in Douma.

It is clear the Syrian Regime has the capability and the intent to use chemical weapons against own people.

It is also 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.

That is why the United Kingdom, together with our US and French allies took co-ordinated, limited and targeted action against the Syrian Regime's chemical weapons' capabilities to alleviate humanitarian suffering.

Britain is clear that we must defend the global rules based system that keeps all of us safe. And I welcome the broad support we have had from the international community and at today's conference.

Russia's disregard for international norms and laws poses a grave threat to the global order we all rely on for our collective security.

In wielding its UN veto twelve times on Syria, Russia has given a green flag to Assad to perpetrate human rights atrocities against his own people.

This is a Regime that has deliberately bombed schools and hospitals.

A Regime that has used nearly seventy thousand barrel bombs, many on civilian targets.

This is a Regime that tries to starve its people into submission and targets aid workers and emergency responders racing to the scene to help.

And let us not forget. This is a Regime that deploys rape as a weapon of war.

Nearly eight out of ten people detained by the Regime have reported suffering sexual violence.

We are here to address the urgent humanitarian needs in Syria and the wider region, but the only solution to end the suffering is a political settlement that brings peace.

And that is why the UK will continue to support the UN-mediated process as the surest path to peace.

We commend the opposition Syrian Negotiations Commission for signalling their readiness for peace and direct talks with the Regime – without pre-conditions.

We call on Russia and Iran to use their influence to bring the Syrian Regime to the negotiating table.

The longer the delay, the more people are going to die, and the more misery and destruction will be inflicted on Syria.

Until that happens, we must keep pushing for greater humanitarian support to help civilians in Syria and Syrian refugees in the region.

I am pleased to see our partners, in particular the US, Germany, France, Norway and the European Union, building on the commitments we made at the London Syria conference.

And I must pay tribute to the sacrifice and contribution of our friends in Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey, as well as the heroic efforts of ordinary Syrians to save lives in the most horrific circumstances imaginable.

As the trajectory of the Syrian war has worsened – our collective interests in a stable and prosperous region has increased. Jordan's resilience and prosperity are critical to the long-run interests of the region.

And that is why the UK will host an international conference with Jordan in London later this year: to showcase Jordan's economic reform plans, its aspiration to build and enable a thriving private sector, and to mobilise support from international investors and donors.

We have seen great generosity over the past seven years, but now is not the time to turn our backs. The humanitarian needs of the Syrian people are as grave now as they have ever been.

The UK has already committed two point four six billion (pounds) to the Syria crisis.

And today we will commit to spend four hundred and fifty million (pounds) in 2018 and three hundred million (pounds) in 2019. This will be in addition to our support for the second EU Facility for Refugees in Turkey.

However, the UK has been clear that we will not provide reconstruction assistance until a credible transition is underway. To do otherwise would run the risk of bolstering the Regime and its barbarity.

But today can't only be about pledges of money, we must see concrete actions, which will lead to greater protection for civilians and aid workers.

Because, as we speak, starving people are being denied aid by a Regime, which refuses to recognise international humanitarian law and because civilians,

including aid workers and frontline responders, are under attack.

Syria is now one of the most dangerous places on earth for aid workers and medical staff. Not only are their supplies and equipment blocked, but they face being targeted themselves in “double tap” bomb attacks by a Regime, which defies every rule of war.

The Union of Medical Care and Relief Organisations reported that five hospitals were bombed, and put out of service, in the space of twenty-four hours in Eastern Ghouta in February.

The victims were patients and medics.

We must support these innocent victims.

And that is why the British Government is demanding that all warring parties comply with the Geneva Conventions on the protected status of civilians and other non-combatants.

We’re calling for an immediate ceasefire and immediate safe access so that brave aid workers and medical staff can do their jobs and help the most vulnerable and the most desperate without fear of attack.

Let us protect the people of Syria, and the people there to help, as we work together to put Syria on a path towards peace.