

[With humanitarian catastrophe looming, civilians in Syria's 'Four Towns' need support now – UN relief official](#)

13 February 2017 – A senior United Nations relief official has today called on all parties to come to an agreement and allow immediate and unfettered humanitarian access to more than 60,000 civilians trapped in four Syrian towns of Al-Zabadani, Al-Fu'ah, Kafraya and Madaya.

These four locations were referred to specifically in the so-called 'Four Towns' Agreement to facilitate humanitarian access to the people in need. However, these places have remained inaccessible for humanitarian workers since November last year.

"The unfair and totally unjustified besiegement is compounded by the tit-for-tat arrangement between the Four Towns, which makes humanitarian access prone to painstaking negotiations that are not based on humanitarian principles," Ali Al-Za'tari, the UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator for Syria, said in a news release.

Mr. Al-Za'tari stressed that the situation is a looming humanitarian catastrophe and called on all those directly involved forces and all parties which have influence on them to convince them to allow urgent humanitarian assistance, including medical evacuations, to take place without delay.

"This has prevented medical cases from receiving proper treatment and evacuation. People are in need, and they cannot wait any longer. We need to act now," he underlined.

Recalling that the principle of free access to people in need must be implemented the news release noted that civilians trapped in the four towns continue to suffer a cycle of daily violence and deprivation, where malnutrition and lack of proper medical care prevail.

The moral and ethical accountability befalls all those who hinder this access, the release read, adding that the UN and humanitarian partners stand ready to provide humanitarian assistance to the Four Towns as soon as negotiations with the parties to the conflict come to conclusion.

[Speech: "Not intent simply with](#)

killing innocents, terrorists seek to destabilise, demoralise, and disrupt our way of life.”

Thank you, Mr President

I am most grateful for the analysis shared by our briefers this morning. And I join others in paying tribute to you, Mr Minister, for your leadership in bringing this important issue to our attention.

Over the past decade, the terrorist threat has evolved. We face increasingly complex threats as terrorists acquire new knowledge and new technology. Not intent simply with killing innocents, terrorists seek to destabilise, demoralise, and disrupt our way of life.

Critical infrastructure, be it a transport system, a communications hub, or a power grid represents an attractive target for these sinister actors. The fact that those responsible for the attack on the Brussels Metro and airport last March had also invested time in surveillance of a Belgian nuclear scientist should concern us all. We must redouble our vigilance to ensure that we are ready to defend the systems that allow our societies to function.

So we wholeheartedly welcome the action taken by this Council today in adopting resolution 2341. That resolution raises the profile of this important issue; it calls on states to improve preparedness; and it strengthens our cooperation in protecting the security of our people and our critical infrastructure.

If we are to truly tackle this threat, I believe we need to focus, Mr President, on three things: preparation, protection and partnerships. So firstly, preparation

It's vital that plans for protecting our critical infrastructure are comprehensively developed, maintained and tested. We echo the call of the resolution for states to develop their own strategies to prepare and respond to any attack.

Threats to our infrastructure can come from many sources: terrorism, criminality or natural hazards. In reducing the risk to our infrastructure, the United Kingdom takes an 'all-risks' approach. That means developing plans that can be used to respond to many types of disruption or threats to life. Measures taken by states to prevent unlawful or criminal interference in our infrastructure can also serve to help prevent terrorist attacks. It's in part because of the strong measures we have taken that terrorist threats to our infrastructure are being mitigated.

Secondly, protection. The threat to some elements of our national infrastructure may be aspirational, but there is one area where the threat is

very real and very high: and that is transport. As recent reports from the UN Secretary General show, there continues to be a serious and enduring threat from international terrorism to our transport networks – specifically to civil aviation.

Three billion passengers reach their destination by air every year. This past year has offered us too many reminders of the risks they face. Attacks on airports in Brussels and Istanbul. The destruction of the Russian Metrojet aircraft over Sinai. The explosion on board a Daallo Airways flight from Mogadishu.

It was to combat these threats that the United Kingdom authored resolution 2309, and today echo its call on States to work with the International Civil Aviation Organisation. Working together we can ensure not only that international security standards keep pace with the terrorist threat, but also, crucially, that they are implemented effectively on the ground.

Finally, partnerships. The critical infrastructure that we need to protect is largely owned by the private sector, and can also form part of complex international networks and supply chains. Preparation and protection of infrastructure are simply good intentions if we fail to work across sectors to achieve them.

Each side has its part to play. Private companies are responsible for ensuring that their infrastructure is protected and that essential services are maintained, just as governments have an obligation to ensure that industry is managing these risks fully and responsibly.

And as this resolution identifies, stronger international partnerships are vital at a time when the functioning of infrastructure relies on cross border networks and supply chains. The sharing of information, early warning networks and expertise will strengthen our common approach.

Mr President,

This Council needs to stay abreast of the evolution of the terrorist threat, and to respond to it. Just as we act to prevent conflict, we should also act pre-emptively to prevent terrorism. Today, we have put another building block in place to strengthen our common effort. Because of our efforts, terrorists intent on stirring chaos have another hurdle to cross. Because of our efforts, our societies are a little safer than they were yesterday.

Thank you.

[Press release: Foreign Secretary to](#)

visit The Gambia and Ghana

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Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson will meet with President Barrow and President Akufo-Addo on a two-day trip to West Africa.

The Foreign Secretary will visit The Gambia and Ghana this week on 14-15 February 2017. This is the first recorded visit to The Gambia by a Foreign Secretary. He will meet President Barrow of The Gambia and President Akufo-Addo of Ghana to discuss the key opportunities and challenges facing each country. The Foreign Secretary will say Global Britain and its partnerships are growing, not shrinking, around the world as demonstrated by the Commonwealth's strength.

In The Gambia in addition to meeting with President Barrow he will visit the UK-funded Medical Research Council and speak to Chevening scholars and employees and employers in the tourism industry – a huge employer in the country.

In Ghana the Foreign Secretary will visit the award-winning Blue Skies company, meet business leaders and young entrepreneurs supported by the Department for International Development's ENGINE project, and meet with "Rising Black Stars" highlighting both countries' extensive cultural ties.

Ahead of the visit, the Foreign Secretary said:

I'm delighted to be the first Foreign Secretary to visit Gambia this week and delighted to have a chance to meet the newly elected President Barrow and President Akufo-Addo of Ghana. Their elections highlight the continuing strengthening of democracy in West Africa.

I am also very pleased that Gambia wants to rejoin the Commonwealth and we will ensure this happens in the coming months. The strength of our partnerships show that Global Britain is growing in influence and activity around the world.

Further information

UN Security Council urges joint measures to protect 'critical infrastructure' from terrorist attacks

13 February 2017 – Given the importance of critical infrastructure for a country's prosperity and security and against the backdrop of increasingly diverse physical and cyber threats from terrorist groups, the United Nations Security Council today underlined the need for international collaboration – both domestically and across borders – to ensure their protection.

In a resolution adopted unanimously today, the 15-member Council reiterated “the need to strengthen efforts to improve security and protection of particularly vulnerable targets, such as infrastructure and public places.”

Attacks against objects and sectors such as banking and finance, telecommunications, emergency services, air, maritime and rail transportation, and energy and water supply – perceived as ‘attractive targets’ for terrorist groups – can result not only in civilian casualties, but also damage property on a large scale, disrupt proper functioning of public services, and create chaos in societies.

Such attacks may also cause widespread environmental damage, as well as significantly undermine national defence capabilities.

Further in the resolution, the Security Council – the UN body with the responsibility for maintenance of international peace and security – also underscored the importance of partnerships at all levels and with public and private stakeholders.

It called upon UN Member States “to share information [...] to prevent, protect, mitigate, investigate, respond to and recover from damage from terrorist attacks on critical infrastructure facilities, including through joint training, and use or establishment of relevant communication or emergency warning networks.”

The resolution was adopted at an open Security Council debate on vulnerabilities, interdependencies and capabilities and the cascading impacts of terrorist attacks on critical infrastructure, as well as measures to prevent them.

VIDEO: UN flags three key areas to enhance protection of critical infrastructure against terrorist attacks. Credit: UN News

International community needs to unite – UN chief Guterres' Chef de Cabinet

Noting that international counter-terrorism cooperation – especially in the area of critical infrastructure – has been limited, Maria Luiza Viotti, Chef de Cabinet of the Secretary-General António Guterres, called on all international community to unite in a coordinated response and outlined the importance of a coordinated response comprising all actors and stakeholders.

“Strategically, this means that the international community needs to unite and be more creative, proactive and effective, including through the development of strong public-private partnerships,” she said, delivering the UN chief’s message to the forum.

“As our world becomes increasingly interconnected – through travel, commerce, communications and in cyber space, we become more vulnerable to attacks by technologically savvy terrorists seeking new ways to spread fear,” Ms. Viotti added.



The Security Council unanimously adopts resolution 2341 (2017), calling upon Member States to consider developing or further improving their strategies for reducing risks to critical infrastructure from terrorist attacks. UN Photo/Rick Bajornas

One attack can have a ripple effect worldwide – INTERPOL chief

Also cautioning that the consequences of an attack in today’s interconnected world could be far reaching, Jürgen Stock, the Secretary-General of the International Criminal Police Organization (ICPO-INTERPOL) said: “One attack on a single point of failure could lead to the disruption or destruction of multiple vital systems in the country directly affected, and a ripple effect worldwide.”

“This creates an appealing target to those intending to harm us. And as our cities and infrastructure evolve, so do their weapons,” he added.

To mitigate such threats, he called for strengthening critical site security and emergency preparedness standards and procedures; protecting national borders and countering terrorist mobility; enhancing vigilance and efforts to interdict materials and tools before they become the “next weapon”; and boosting inter-agency and international collaboration, as a force multiplier.

“In an interconnected world, we will not succeed in protecting national infrastructure in isolation. This is why initiatives [...] and the steps [...] by the international community are essential,” he underlined.

Other speakers speaking at the debate included Hamid Ali Rao, Deputy Director-General of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW); Chris Trelawny, Special Adviser to the Secretary-General of the International Maritime Organizations (IMO) on Maritime Security and Facilitation; Olli Heinonen, Senior Advisor on Science and Non-proliferation

at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies and former Deputy Director-General of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

[Ruth: A free-trading Britain can face down SNP plans for break-up](#)

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- Ruth: A free-trading Britain can face down SNP plans for break-up

13 Feb 2017



An “outward-looking, free-trading” Britain can provide people across the UK with the security and opportunity they crave, Ruth Davidson will say in a keynote speech this evening.

Saying the country must reject the path of “economic nationalism”, she will set out a vision for a country that “pushes at our boundaries, instead of building walls”.

And while the SNP has sought to use the UK’s vote to leave the EU as reason to ramp up its campaign for another referendum, Ruth will say that – in contrast – it has made the case for Scottish independence “weaker and more illogical than ever”.

Nonetheless, she will say the UK needs to face up to an SNP government which has watched the tactics of the Leave campaign, learned from them, and is now “itching to get its own campaign bus into gear”.

She will say that a key argument against independence will be on trade – pointing to how Scotland’s trade with the UK is worth four times that of exports to the EU.

Voting to leave the UK in response to Brexit would be akin to “stubbing your toe, to then amputate your foot”.

In tonight’s address, she will also say it’s vital politicians respect the result of referendums, and had Scotland voted for separation in 2014, she wouldn’t have denied it nor demanded a re-run.

Scottish Conservative leader Ruth Davidson said:

“The SNP is a formidable political operation which – I suspect – has learnt from the tactics of the Leave campaign last year and is itching to get its

own campaign bus into gear as we speak.

“So my view is that the case for the Union must be made afresh, and we have to persuade people once again that our own Union of nations still works for us all.

“And there is something of a Brexit paradox here.

“Because while Brexit has provided the means for Nicola Sturgeon to crank up her independence campaign once more – it has also made that case weaker and more illogical than ever.

“As we learned only last month in official Scottish Government statistics, trade within the UK internal market is worth four times to Scotland than trade with the EU.

“The logic is therefore clear.

“If everyone in Scotland agrees that free trade with Europe is important – and we do – it is literally impossible to deny that trade with the rest of the UK matters four times as much.

“But rather than accept that logic, the same old nationalist contortions are applied.

“It is already cranking up the grievance machine in an attempt to push people towards the exit door.”