

# Protecting Syrians amidst the COVID-19 outbreak

Thank you very much. And the United Kingdom is grateful to USG Lowcock and to Special Envoy Pedersen for their briefings. Both delivered stark warnings about the situation in Syria and the terrible toll that COVID-19 might take on a country inundated by nearly 10 years of conflict. And the UK shares that deep concern about the potentially catastrophic impacts that COVID-19 might have.

Of course, this risk is compounded by the destruction of health facilities by Russia and the regime over the years. As someone mentioned earlier, nearly half of the facilities that were standing in 2011 have gone – an awful situation from which to face this crisis. We look forward to the Secretary-General's Board of Inquiry report on some of those actions.

We heard from Mr Lowcock about the desperate humanitarian situation in the north-west of Syria as the conflict enters its tenth year. 6.2 million internally displaced people are at particularly severe risk. Almost one million of those are in the north-west, living in, as we heard from Mr Lowcock, in appalling conditions and entirely reliant on cross-border aid. We also heard about how the most vulnerable are children and women, and it was particularly depressing to hear of the impact on the population. This is why the UK recently announced a further \$100 million for the scaled up humanitarian response, which brings our overall commitment to around \$200 million.

We recognise those humanitarians who are continuing to work across Syria in the face of not just now violence, intimidation, but also the new threat of COVID-19. We salute their courage and commitment.

I wanted to take this moment to ask Mr Lowcock: in addition to the ceasefire, for which he rightly called, what are the key steps that you need to help Syrians combat COVID-19 in Syria? It's clear that cross-line is not an effective substitute for cross-border aid; to tackle COVID-19, it's imperative that aid is delivered through the most effective means possible. This means cross-border in the north-west and the north-east, as recommended by the Secretary-General in his February report. The whole Council needs to reflect on the negative impact of the current arrangements, and in the life of the required response to COVID-19, we should both continue and expand humanitarian access when we review the arrangements.

Mr President, if this virus is to be fought effectively in Syria, the ceasefire in Idlib must be permanent. To be enduring and ensure that civilians are protected and to receive the humanitarian assistance they require, it must be monitored and verified by the United Nations. So we welcome and we support Mr Lowcock and Mr Pedersen's call for a complete, immediate nationwide ceasefire in Syria to enable all-out efforts to suppress the virus.

Russia, earlier in their statement, called on us to help all Syrians. What the Syrian people really need more than anything is this genuine and enduring nationwide ceasefire and an inclusive political process, as called for in Resolution 2254. Anything less from those who wield power and influence in Syria at the moment might well be condemning Syrians to a new health crisis and in turn create further global crisis.

Thank you, Mr President.

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## [New government partnership with airlines to fly back more tourists stranded abroad](#)

- partnership between government and airlines to fly home stranded British travellers
- government chartered flights from priority countries to UK over the weekend and more to take place this week
- up to £75 million government funding pledged to bring UK travellers back home

More tourists stranded abroad because of coronavirus will be able to get back to the UK following an arrangement struck between the government and the airlines industry.

The global travel situation caused by coronavirus has led to many people becoming stranded overseas. This is an unprecedented challenge with many countries closing borders and imposing travel restrictions with little warning. This has left many UK travellers struggling to get home.

Virgin, Easyjet, Jet2 and Titan Airways have today signed a memorandum of understanding negotiated by the Foreign Secretary and Transport Secretary. British Airways have also made clear that they will work with us in the national interest to get people home, and other airlines are expected to join. The Secretaries of State have published a [joint letter to the airlines](#). The government is focused on getting Brits home through a twin-track approach:

- airlines recognising their responsibility for transporting their passengers with pre-booked tickets home, through offering them alternatives where routes are cancelled, allowing them to change tickets, where permissible – including between carriers – and offering them the latest information and advice as the situation changes
- where commercial routes do not exist, the government will provide up to £75 million financial support to enable special charter flights – operated by the airlines above and others – to fly to priority countries

to bring back UK residents

Foreign Secretary, Dominic Raab, said:

This is a worrying time for many British citizens travelling abroad. We've already worked with airlines and governments to enable hundreds of thousands to return home on commercial flights, and we will keep as many of those options open as possible.

Where commercial flights are not possible, we will build on the earlier charter flights we organised back from China, Japan, Cuba, Ghana and Peru. The arrangements agreed today will provide a clearer basis to organise special charter flights where Britons find themselves stranded. Our priority will always be the most vulnerable.

Special charter flights for countries with no commercial routes will be prioritised according to the number of stranded British travellers and their vulnerability, including an assessment of the local health provision. In some places, access for flights to land and the ability to move around within the country to assemble for return flights will also be decisive factors.

Charter flights are already up and running to Ghana and Tunisia. We will add more countries this week with the aim of bringing people back from countries such as India and South Africa where large numbers of British travellers are stuck and commercial routes are completely suspended. We are negotiating intensely with countries around the world to secure permissions for return flights where airspace has been closed.

The government has pledged up to £75 million to pay airlines for the additional charter flights to ensure tickets are affordable. Once special flights have been arranged, these will be promoted through the government's [travel advice](#) and by the British embassy or high commission in country. British travellers who want a seat on the flight will book and pay directly through a dedicated travel management company.

British tourists stranded abroad who want to return to the UK should first check if there are commercial routes available by visiting the airline websites, [FCO travel advice pages](#) for the country they are in and local [British embassy social media](#).

If there are no commercial options, they should visit the [travel advice pages](#) and sign up to alerts for their location and follow [embassy social media](#) and email updates. When special return flights become available, these will be advertised by the embassy and British nationals on Travel Advice Pages and Embassy social media and those who have registered for updates will be contacted via email. British nationals will be asked to register their interest through our booking agents CTM.

Where people are in real need, our consular teams will work with them to consider their options. As a last resort, the Foreign Office will offer an

[emergency loan](#).

We have also tripled the capacity of the FCO's call centre to ensure that people in emergency situations around the world are able to get assistance.

Secretary of State for Transport, Grant Shapps said:

This is a very difficult time for British citizens travelling overseas, or those with families and loved ones abroad, which is why we are doing everything we can to ensure airlines can operate and bring people back home safely.

Alastair Willson, Managing Director Titan Airways said:

As a proud British company, we stand ready to work with the government to do all we can to bring stranded British travellers home.

The government continues to urge countries around the world to keep transit hubs, airports and airspace open to ensure travellers are able to return to the UK. The Foreign Secretary has spoken to over 20 of his counterparts to support this effort and we have helped hundreds of thousands of British tourists return from all over the globe including 8,500 from Morocco, around 5,000 from Cyprus, and an estimated 150,000 from Spain.

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## **[eAlert: 30 March 2020 – Round two of the Urban Tree Challenge Fund opens today](#)**

- Only go outside for food, health reasons or work (but only if you cannot work from home)
- If you go out, stay 2 metres (6ft) away from other people at all times
- Wash your hands as soon as you get home

Do not meet others, even friends or family.

You can spread the virus even if you don't have symptoms.

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# New service allows DBS to respond quicker to recruitment requests during COVID-19

In response to coronavirus (COVID-19), the Home Office and the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) have put temporary arrangements in place, to provide DBS checks and fast-track emergency checks of the Adults' and Children's Barred Lists free-of-charge.

This will apply to healthcare and social care workers being recruited in connection with the provision of care and treatment of coronavirus in England and Wales, including some of those who have volunteered to help the NHS.

These arrangements will provide employers with the option to appoint new recruits into regulated activity with adults and/or children, as long as the individuals are not barred and appropriate measures are put in place to manage the individual until the full DBS check is received.

DBS works to support recruiters and voluntary organisations by allowing employers to make safer recruitment decisions. The whole country is coming together to overcome the COVID-19 crisis and thousands of volunteers have come forward to support the health service although the vast majority of these people will not require a DBS check.

Dr Gillian Fairfield, DBS Chairman said:

We understand the vital role that DBS has to play in the country's response to the pandemic. We have been working closely with the Home Office and the Department of Health and Social Care in order to introduce measures that allow us to respond quickly to the applications, as we recognise that the care sector needs immediate support from new recruits and volunteers.

The introduction of a fast track Adults' and Children's Barred List check will allow the NHS, and other healthcare and voluntary sector organisations to get the right people into the right place quickly and safely.

Eric Robinson, DBS Chief Executive added:

The organisation is fully prepared, and we have measures in place to ensure we can continue to operate with minimal disruption to our services.

This new fast-track check is designed to help support the national effort to fight coronavirus. We need to make sure that only those eligible for those checks are requesting them as misuse of the emergency provision will delay the urgent deployment of health and social care personnel.

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## [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): an update on the Grenfell Tower site](#)

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