

Press release: Priti Patel statement in response to \$8bn appeal for Syria in 2017

Finland and the United Nations co-hosted an event on the Syria crisis in Helsinki today, which has seen the launch of a UN-led appeal for \$8 billion to meet humanitarian needs inside Syria and across the region in 2017.

Responding to the new appeal, International Development Secretary Priti Patel said:

The UN's call-out to the international community today is the single biggest appeal it has ever made, highlighting that the conflict in Syria remains the world's biggest humanitarian crisis.

The siege of east Aleppo at the end of last year reminded the world of the suffering and brutality that continues to be inflicted on the Syrian people after six years of unrelenting conflict. Schools and hospitals were hit and starvation used as a weapon of war. Hundreds were killed, tens of thousands more lost everything as they were forced to flee their homes.

Sadly, the medieval siege tactics employed were not unique to Aleppo, we are seeing them used again and again across Syria.

As many as 700,000 Syrians – nearly half of them children – remain under siege in 15 different parts of the country. Millions more have no regular access to the basic food, water and shelter they need to stay alive. Yet there is a very real risk that the barrel bombs, chlorine gas and indiscriminate violence that so shocked the world in Aleppo now becomes the new normal. We cannot become desensitised to such horrors.

Britain has repeatedly set the pace in responding to this crisis and our commitment remains unwavering. UK aid ensured blankets, medical care, clean water and food reached those fleeing Aleppo. Across Syria, our support continues to mean the difference between life and death to hundreds of thousands more. We have pledged more than £2.3 billion to support those affected by the conflict, our largest ever response to a single humanitarian crisis.

At the same time, we continue to call on all parties to the conflict to implement fully the ceasefire announced by Russia, Turkey and Iran and to allow aid to be delivered to all of those in need. Since the ceasefire began, only one besieged area has been reached by an aid convoy. That is unacceptable.

Ultimately, only a genuine and inclusive political settlement can

deliver a lasting peace. But while we continue to push for that, the world must respond swiftly and generously to this new appeal in order to save lives of desperate Syrians. We must not let the depravities of this war become inevitable or give up hope. A new year brings a new chance for real, meaningful change and we must seize it.

ENDS

Notes to editors

1. Today's conference provided an opportunity to present the objectives, contents and achievements of the UN-led Regional Resilience and Refugee Plan (3RP) to meet needs in Syria's neighbouring countries, as well as identifying the humanitarian and resilience priorities inside Syria. More detail is available here: <http://www.helsinki2017.org/>
2. The UK is at the forefront of the response to the Syria crisis, with life-saving humanitarian support reaching millions of people inside Syria and in neighbouring countries.
3. The UK has pledged more than £2.3 billion to support those affected by the conflict, our largest ever response to a single humanitarian crisis. In 2016 the UK is the third largest bilateral contributor to the humanitarian response in Syria, and the second largest overall since the start of the response in 2012.
4. For more information on the UK's humanitarian response, please see: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/factsheet-the-uks-humanitarian-aid-response-to-the-syria-crisis>

[Schools are struggling to plug the massive budget deficits created by Tory Government – Angela Rayner](#)

Angela

Rayner MP, Labour's Shadow Education Secretary, ahead of the party's Opposition Day Debate on schools funding, said:

"Schools are struggling to plug the massive budget deficits created by a Tory Government incapable of running a schools system.

"On Monday we heard from headteachers who are increasingly faced with difficult choices of whether they can afford to have classrooms cleaned, sport pitches mowed or to keep hold of vital support staff who are essential to school communities.

“With three quarters of school budgets taken up by staffing costs, the fear across the sector is that classroom teachers could be cut next.

“At the election the Tories offered warm words to parents about better schools and promised to protect school funding. It is clear that their legacy will now be one of cutting school budgets, super-sized class sizes, and no progress made in the international league tables.

“Our children deserve better.”

[News story: UK – South Africa joint trade statement](#)

Secretary of State for International Trade, Dr Liam Fox, and the South Africa Minister of Trade and Industry, Dr Rob Davies, met in London today, Tuesday 24 January 2017, for bilateral talks.

The meeting was a continuation of the ongoing high-level engagement between the United Kingdom and South Africa (SA) to discuss trade and economic relations and follows the recent visit of the Chancellor of the Exchequer to South Africa in December 2016.

Bilateral trade in goods and services between the UK and South Africa stood at £7.6 billion in 2015, with UK exports of goods and services increasing by 25% in the last decade. South Africa’s exports into the UK have increased by over 5% on an annual basis for the last decade. South Africa is the third biggest trading partner for the UK in the Commonwealth. The meeting was an opportunity for ministers to discuss existing links as well as opportunities to further develop these.

Both ministers committed to strengthening ties as the UK prepares to leave the European Union and to work together to identify trade and investment opportunities that will benefit not only the UK and South Africa, but across the wider southern Africa and Africa region.

International Trade Secretary, Dr Liam Fox, said

South Africa is a key trading partner to the UK – a long-standing, strong and strategic ally for the United Kingdom in Africa and internationally. It is our largest export market in Africa; the largest economy in the southern Africa region and a fellow G20 member. South Africa is also the largest recipient of UK foreign direct investment in Africa accounting for 30% of total UK foreign

direct investment (FDI) in 2014, a value of £13.1 billion.

As we become an even more outward looking country, we will continue building on our relationship with South Africa and today's meeting was an opportunity to discuss how we progress that.

Minister for Trade and Industry, Dr Rob Davies, said:

The UK is a historical and strategic trade and investment partner for South Africa and remains a key market especially for agriculture exports accounting for over 20% of SA's exports of wine and 30% of fruit exports globally. The UK is the biggest destination in the EU for South African investment, accounting for 30% of SA investments into Europe. Furthermore, 46% of SA's global investment originates from the UK.

We must ensure that we have a predictable trade and investment environment for mutual benefit for both parties. As we work to achieve this, South Africa looks forward to discussing how our trade post-Brexit could build on the recently concluded Economic Partnership Agreement with the EU.

[With international agreement on ceasefire monitoring, UN envoy praises Syrian delegations in Astana](#)

24 January 2017 – The talks to strengthen the ceasefire in war-torn Syria ended today in Astana, Kazakhstan, with agreement on how to monitor the effort started last month and praise from the United Nations Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura.

“Let me commend Russia, Turkey and Iran for their decision to establish a trilateral mechanism to observe and ensure full compliance with the ceasefire,” Mr. de Mistura said, adding that the agreement is a “concrete step” towards implementation of Security Council resolutions on the issue.

In addition to representatives from the three countries, the two-day talks were the first time that Syrian opposition participated in the discussions alongside representatives of the Syrian Government.

Mr. de Mistura, who was a conduit for many of the discussions, praised the delegations noting that “it has required political courage from them to sit in the same room and listen to their respective demands.”

He added that both Syrian parties had told him that “their immediate priority was and remains to strengthen the ceasefire.”

With more than 650,000 people in besieged areas in Syria, according to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the ceasefire is expected to allow greater humanitarian aid to areas previously cut off by the fighting.

“The ceasefire can additionally help the fight of the international community against terrorism in Syria and the wider region,” Mr. de Mistura said.

In addition, the ceasefire is expected to help create “a supportive environment” for engagement between the Syrian parties ahead of the 8 February talks in Geneva, the UN Special Envoy noted, adding that he will head to New York to consult with the Secretary-General and brief the Security Council ahead of those talks.

The discussions in Switzerland will be held under the auspices of the UN and include issues of governance, constitution and elections in the context of Security Council resolution 2254 (2015), which endorsed a road map for a peace process in Syria.

“We cannot allow another ceasefire to dissolve because of a lack of a political process. Now is the time for the international community in all its dimensions to come together and support one integrated political negotiating process, as provided for in SCR 2254,” he said.

UN chief Guterres pledges commitment to achieving world free of nuclear weapons

24 January 2017 – Disarmament can play an important role in ending existing conflicts and preventing the outbreak of new strife, United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres said today, pledging to actively pursue the abolition of all weapons of mass destruction and the strict regulation of conventional weapons.

“I am committed to achieving a world free of nuclear weapons,” the Secretary-General declared in a video message to the Geneva-based Conference on Disarmament, which opened the first segment of its three-part 2017 session yesterday.

Recalling that upon taking office he had described a world of new and old conflicts woven in a complex, interconnected web, Mr. Guterres said today that those conflicts have precipitated gross violations of international

humanitarian and human rights law.

As such, while disarmament can play an important role in ending existing conflicts and preventing the outbreak of new strife, disarmament and arms control processes provide the breathing space for confidence to be built, stability to be strengthened and trust to be established.

“This was true during the Cold War and it is true now,” continued the UN chief, stressing that the need for breathing space is more urgent than ever as global tensions are rising, “sabres have been rattled and dangerous words spoken about the use of nuclear weapons.”

As the sole multilateral disarmament negotiating body, “the world looks to the Conference to provide rationality and diplomatic solutions, to promote security through peaceful action, and to create the instruments we need to develop confidence, trust and international stability,” Mr. Guterres told the 65-member panel, adding: “You have a responsibility to all States and all peoples. Now is the time to live up to it.”

“I encourage you to work hard to find compromise and to make the most of your partners in civil society and academia. The United Nations will be your ally and assist however we can,” he concluded.

The Conference on Disarmament, established in 1979 as the single multilateral disarmament negotiating forum of the international community, is not formally a UN body but reports annually, or more frequently as appropriate, to the UN General Assembly. Michael Møller, the Director-General of the UN Office at Geneva, serves as Secretary-General of the Conference, as well as Mr. Guterres’ personal representative to the body.

Currently, the consensus-based body focuses primarily on the following issues: cessation of the nuclear arms race and nuclear disarmament; prevention of nuclear war, including all related matters; prevention of an arms race in outer space; effective international arrangements to assure non-nuclear-weapon States against the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons; new types of weapons of mass destruction and new systems of such weapons including radiological weapons; comprehensive programme of disarmament and transparency in armaments.