

The siege in Daraa must stop

Thank you, Mr President, and thank you to today's briefers.

As we've heard, the situation in Daraa is severe. The UK remains deeply concerned about the situation in Daraa. 50,000 civilians have been besieged there since June.

Heavy bombardment has led to the displacement of 37,000 people and at least eight civilians have been killed.

Civilian infrastructure has been targeted by the Syrian regime, as it has throughout the conflict, with shelling rendering parts of the Daraa National Hospital inoperable.

And civilians continue to contend with shortages of fuel, cooking gas, water, and bread, as a result of the regime's behaviour.

The UK calls on all parties to ensure and expedite impartial humanitarian access through all modalities, including through partners not registered in Damascus.

In particular, we call for immediate humanitarian access to be granted to Daraa el-Balad where 5,000 to 6,000 families have been without access to humanitarian aid and support since 5 August.

We welcome the recent statement by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights addressing the appalling humanitarian situation, as well as the remarks today from the Special Envoy and Undersecretary Griffiths. We would welcome an update from the UN on progress on efforts to develop contingency plans and ensure a positive response to the request for an inter-agency convoy to Daraa.

All people of Daraa must have access to vital support services and food. The siege must stop.

We also remain concerned by the escalation of violence in the northwest of Syria, in violation of the ceasefire agreement. We are appalled at UNICEF reports that at least 45 children have been killed or injured since the beginning of July. We urge all parties to the conflict to respect the ceasefire and ensure the protection of civilians and humanitarian workers, in line with international humanitarian law.

And finally, on the humanitarian situation, there is a need to address water scarcity through an inclusive, multi-sector response plan coordinated at a 'Whole of Syria' level with support from the UN's Syria Regional Office in Amman.

We welcome recent progress in this regard, and look forward to consolidated analysis and response planning.

On the political process, the UK urges implementation of the steps enshrined in UN Security Council Resolution 2254, namely: a nationwide ceasefire; unhindered aid access; the release of those arbitrarily detained; the establishment of conditions for safe refugee return; and free and fair elections pursuant to a new constitution. They represent the only way out of this conflict.

Special Envoy and Undersecretary General, you have our full support for your continued efforts to make progress on this file.

Thank you, Mr President.