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Humanitarian response to the Syrian crisis: EU Commissioner convenes donors, Syria's neighbours and aid agencies

As a major donor in the Syrian crisis and a leading advocate on behalf of the affected civilians and aid organizations, the European Union has jointly with the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan brought together relevant stakeholders to discuss the most pressing challenges, coordinate activities and identify ways to bring relief to violence-hit communities.

Kristalina Georgieva, the Commissioner for humanitarian aid and crisis response, hosted the meeting that took place today (26 September) during the 67th United Nations General Assembly in New York, together with the Permanent Representative of Jordan to the UN - His Royal Highness Prince Zeid bin Raad.

"With no end to the fighting in sight, with serious food and medicine shortages and with winter approaching, it was high time to discuss at the highest possible level what the needs are and how we can bring help to people who need it," Commissioner Georgieva explained.

Leaders of international organizations - the International Committee of the Red Cross, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, the UN Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the World Food Programme and the Organisation for Islamic Cooperation - attended the event, alongside ministers and senior diplomats from major donors (the United States, the United Kingdom, Switzerland, Sweden, Russia, Norway, the Netherlands, Japan, Italy, Germany, France, Denmark, China, Canada and Australia), countries from the Middle East (the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Kuwait) and Syria's neighbours (Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan).

The participants shared the concern that, while the solution of this crisis is political, the humanitarian commitment needs to keep up with the growing needs, particularly in view of the upcoming winter and the refugee flow. To respond to this challenge, they agreed that the most pressing priorities ahead are to increase humanitarian aid and provide medicines, blankets, stoves, heating fuel and other non-food items.

Reacting faster to the needs of refugees was also discussed. Commissioner Georgieva expressed gratitude to Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan for welcoming the fleeing Syrians and helping them face their hardship in a dignified way. "The generosity of these countries is making a big difference. The European Commission is contributing to the care for the refugees and will continue its steady support for meeting their most urgent needs," she underlined.

Several participants pointed out to the essential need for all warring parties to respect International Humanitarian Law, protect civilians and allow humanitarian workers a safe and free passage to those in need.

The discussion of the humanitarian priorities in this crisis will continue at the next meeting of the Syrian Humanitarian Forum.

Background

The event underlines the great importance the European Union attaches to supporting the Syrian people and the humanitarian workers who spare no effort to help Syrian civilians in this dramatic moment. The EU is the most generous donor in this emergency with a response that has been scaled up progressively to match the escalation of the needs. Together, the EU contribution reaches almost €222 million (over €84 million coming from EU Member States and more than €137 million - from the European Commission. The latter figure includes €96 million in humanitarian aid).

While the bulk of the European Commission's humanitarian aid is dedicated to bringing relief inside Syria, a substantial part is helping Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan cope with the influx of refugees. The combined assistance from the Commission and Member States makes the EU the most generous donor in this crisis.

Alongside its humanitarian aid, the European Commission has been active with civil protection assistance. The EU Civil Protection Mechanism has been activated twice – in April 2012 to help Turkey cope with the influx of refugees, and in September 2012 to assist Jordan. A team of EU civil protection experts is currently in Jordan where it is helping assess the needs for in-kind assistance.

Helping alleviate the crisis in Syria is among the priorities of the EU at the 67th UN General Assembly. Catherine Ashton, High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice-President of the European Commission, has raised the issue with a number of the EU's international partners, and on Tuesday met with Joint Special Representative to Syria Lakhdar Brahimi. They agreed that it is of the utmost importance that the international community works together to bring an end to the fighting. The High Representative offered the EU's unequivocal support to Mr. Brahimi's efforts and pledged to provide him with assistance.

For more information

Commissioner Georgieva's website:

http://ec.europa.eu/commission_2010-2014/georgieva/index_en.htm

The European Commission's humanitarian work on the Syrian crisis:

http://ec.europa.eu/echo/files/aid/countries/factsheets/syria_en.pdf

Europe by Satellite:

<http://ec.europa.eu/avservices/ebs/schedule.cfm>

Contacts :

[Irina Novakova](#) (+32 2 295 75 17)

[David Sharrock](#) (+32 2 296 89 09)