

Syrian Crisis - What are we doing?

What is Australia doing to help those affected by violence in Syria?

- The situation in Syria is grave and challenges remain over access to conflict-affected populations and the safety of humanitarian workers.
 - The UN estimates that 2.5 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance.
 - The UN estimates that over 20,000 people have been killed, over 1.2 million have been internally displaced and around 300,000 have sought refuge in neighbouring countries since protests began in March 2011.
- On 27 September, Senator Carr pledged an additional \$4 million in response to the Syria crisis, including:
 - \$2 million for emergency medical and food assistance within Syria to people affected by the escalating violence
 - \$2 million to assist Syrians seeking refuge in neighbouring countries (Jordan, Turkey, Lebanon and Iraq) to access shelter, food and medical services through the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).
- Australia has provided \$24.5 million to date, to meet humanitarian needs including:
 - \$3 million to United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) to support activities through the Syria Humanitarian Assistance Response Plan.
 - \$8 million to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to support Syrian refugees who have fled to neighbouring countries through the Syria Regional Refugee Response Plan
 - \$3 million to the World Food Programme (WFP) for emergency food assistance
 - \$10 million to an unnamed (at their request) NGO to provide food assistance and medical supplies to affected populations in Syria
 - An estimated \$500,000 for the deployment of expert personnel to assist refugees in Jordan and Lebanon, in the areas of logistics, water and sanitation, child protection and health.

If asked: What is the status of Senator Carr's plan for health care in Syria?

- With little prospect of a political solution in Syria in the short term, Senator Carr has brought forward a plan aimed at protecting hospitals and health care workers in Syria. It has three pillars:
 - Securing a commitment from all sides not to target medical personnel: not to block access to doctors, hospitals or emergency care; and not to attack medical facilities.
 - Consideration of a neutral third party to monitor implementation of the plan; and
 - Continued provision of humanitarian assistance to ease the suffering of those caught up in the conflict, including emergency medical supplies.
- The intention is not to cut across, but to reinforce, the important work of others in this area [especially Joint Special Representative Brahimi, and the UN] and to keep this important issue on the international agenda.
- Senator Carr has been encouraged by constructive discussions with

several counterparts in recent weeks.

- The next Syria Humanitarian Forum, to be held in Geneva on 9 November, will be an important forum for discussing how we reinforce efforts to protect access to medical and humanitarian services. *[DFAT has cleared the above talking points]*

Background

To date, attempts at a ceasefire and other peacemaking measures have failed, including former Joint Special Envoy Kofi Annan's six point peace plan, and the Geneva Action Group Communique. The new UN/Arab League envoy to Syria, Lakhdar Brahimi (former Algerian foreign minister) is yet to propose a plan to resolve the Syrian conflict. Brahimi replaced Annan who did not renew his mandate at the end of August, citing the increasing militarisation of the Syrian conflict and the "clear lack of unity" in the Security Council as reasons. The main stumbling block to any possibility of a political resolution in the short term is Russia and Chinese opposition to strong action in the UN Security Council on Syria, having vetoed three Security Council resolutions in 2011/12.

The Syrian government has designated the Syrian Arab Red Crescent (SARC) as the lead provider of humanitarian relief. Local NGOs and community-based organisations are working with UN agencies, and eight international NGOs have been authorized by SARC and the Syrian government to deliver assistance on the ground.

UN agencies and humanitarian partners are seeking US\$347 million for 58 projects under the revised Syria Humanitarian Assistance Response Plan (scaled up from the US\$180 million requested in June this year). 29.9 per cent of the requested funds have been received so far. An additional US\$488 million is requested under the UNHCR Regional Refugee Response Plan, which was revised on 27 September.

Australia's contribution to humanitarian relief for Syria has been \$24.5 million to date, of which: \$3 million has been allocated to OCHA to support projects in Syria through the Humanitarian Assistance Response Plan; \$8 million has been provided to UNHCR to support Syrian refugees who have fled to neighbouring countries; \$3 million has been provided to the World Food Programme to provide emergency food assistance to Syrians affected by the conflict; and, under an ongoing agreement, RedR personnel to provide expert support in logistics, water and sanitation, child protection and health to UNHCR and UNICEF's activities in Jordan and Lebanon (estimated \$500,000).

Australia has also provided \$10 million^{s.37} to provide food assistance and medical supplies to affected populations in Syria;^{s.37} *has requested that their involvement not be announced to ensure the safety of* ^{s.37} *staff on the ground.*

The health situation in Syria is of grave concern with fewer than 56 per cent of primary health facilities and 50 per cent of hospitals fully functioning. Access to health care facilities for both patients and health care providers is one of the main obstacles to the provision of health care. ICRC and WHO are highly concerned about the safety of health professionals, patients and health facilities following repeated reports of lack of respect for and deliberate targeting of medical staff and facilities.

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On 27 September in New York, Senator Carr announced that Australia would bring forward a plan aimed at protecting hospitals and health care workers in Syria. The next Syria Humanitarian Forum (SHF), to be held in Geneva on 9 November, may provide an opportunity to discuss the plan, and other efforts to improve protection of and access to humanitarian and medical services.

The SHF was established in March 2012 under the auspices of the UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, to provide a forum for member states, regional organisation and humanitarian organisations to engage in open dialogue on the humanitarian situation in Syria. The SHF was created in an attempt to keep humanitarian efforts separate from the political agenda and is open to all UN member states. Russia, China, Iran and Syria have all participated actively.

Prepared By:

Melissa Mitchell

MENA/MENALAC

Phone: s.47F

Date: 15/10/12 - 18:00

Cleared By:

Scott Dawson

First Assistant Director General

South & West Asia Division

Phone: s.47F
