

16 January 2017

Our reference: MIN/105180/2016

Rt Hon George Howarth MP
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA



Foreign &
Commonwealth
Office

King Charles Street
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De George,

Thank you for your email of 19 December to the Foreign Secretary on behalf of your constituents about Syria. I am replying as Minister responsible for our relations with the Middle East.

I share your constituents' concerns regarding the situation in Syria. The scenes that we are seeing from Aleppo are absolutely heart-breaking. After months of besiegement by the regime and its backers, the situation has deteriorated further in recent weeks. Hundreds of civilians have been killed in Aleppo by the regime's latest offensive and thousands displaced by the fighting. The UK has consistently called for a ceasefire in Aleppo and protection for civilians and we have used all diplomatic means to push for this.

On 15 December the Prime Minister attended the December European Council, which agreed conclusions making clear demands for the regime and its backers to allow full humanitarian access to east Aleppo, for the UN to provide aid and oversee evacuations to ensure civilian protection. On 19 December the UN Security Council adopted a resolution which demands full access for the UN across Syria and in particular requests the UN to monitor evacuations from eastern Aleppo. The UK strongly supported this action in view of our profound concerns at reports of atrocities taking place as eastern Aleppo is being evacuated. All parties must now comply fully with this resolution. It is crucial that the UN oversees these evacuations to ensure civilian protection.

The regime and its backers continue to bomb and shell towns and areas across Syria, causing severe humanitarian suffering. There is no way that this can be justified in the name of fighting terrorism. On the contrary, such vicious targeting of the moderate opposition only serves to radicalise and strengthen extremists.

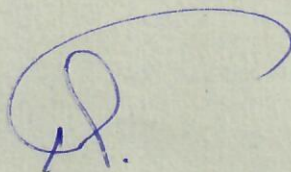
The UK continues to engage with the US and other partners, and in the UN Security Council and the International Syria Support Group, to push for progress on the urgent issues in Syria. We continue to work to identify what more the international community can do and have not ruled out any options.

We remain convinced that long-term peace in Syria requires transition away from the Asad regime, and a political settlement which allows Syria to become a stable, peaceful state with an inclusive government with which we can work to tackle Daesh and other extremists. To support the goal of a successful political peace process, the Foreign Secretary hosted the Syrian opposition High Negotiations Committee in London on 7 September. They set out a positive and inclusive vision for political transition, which we believe is a valuable contribution to the negotiation process and an important step on the path to a better future for Syria.

Whilst doing all we can to support a political settlement, the UK continues to be at the forefront of global efforts to provide humanitarian aid, having committed over £2.3 billion to vulnerable and displaced people inside Syria and to refugees in neighbouring countries.

The UK will continue to do all that we can to ensure that a long-term, lasting solution is found to resolve the current crisis in Syria. And in the meantime, we will maintain all efforts to help those people affected by it.

Yours sincerely,



TOBIAS ELLWOOD MP
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State