

## Syria conference highlights urgent need for humanitarian aid

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News

A two-day international conference on Syria, attended by representatives of NGOs working in the war-torn country, kicked off on Tuesday in Brussels.



It is the second conference to be co-chaired by the EU and the UN on 'Supporting the future of Syria and the region'.

The conference, which concludes on Wednesday and follows a similar event in London in 2017, aims to mobilise humanitarian aid for Syrians and garner political support for the UN-led peace process.

As the Syrian war enters its eighth year, the conference was told that the humanitarian situation continues to deteriorate. Over 13 million Syrians are now in need of humanitarian assistance, and more than five million Syrian refugees are displaced outside the country.

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One of the aims of the conference is to mobilise humanitarian aid to Syrians inside the country and neighbouring countries.

It also seeks to garner political support for the UN-led peace process.

EU foreign affairs chief Federica Mogherini said the gathering was an opportunity for further pledges and additional efforts to allow access to places where aid is urgently needed, adding, "We would like to use the Brussels conference to send a clear message from the international community that the fighting has to stop and that the political process has to start."

The conference was attended by participants from more than 85 countries and organisations at ministerial level.

One of the keynote speakers, Filippo Grandi, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, said NGOs and partner organisations play a particularly important role in delivering aid to people affected by the Syrian conflict.

Describing the work of such organisations as "indispensable", Grandi added that he hoped the conference could be a "bridge" between those working on the ground in Syria and decision-makers.

Grandi, addressing the issue of refugees and people displaced by the bitter conflict, said he wanted to see "increased contributions" from the international community.

The conference heard from several NGOs in the region, one of whom appealed for "more sanctions" against Russia, which is backing the Syrian regime in its fight with rebels.

However, another NGO said that more sanctions "is not the answer as this will only cause even more suffering" in the country.

Emily Whitehead, of the humanitarian aid group Mercy Corps, joined others in calling for countries to "share the demographic burden" of Syrian refugees.

She also highlighted the gender-based violence in Syria, calling for better protection for women and girls caught up in the war.

Further comment came from Luca Jahier, the newly-elected president of the European Economic and Social Committee, who urged the EU to do "whatever it takes to bring change for the millions of civilians at risk" in the country.

Jahier branded the alleged use of chemical weapons by the Syrian regime as "morally reprehensive" and without any concern for civilian casualties." The alleged chemical attack earlier this month led to US-led air strikes on specific sites in Syria.

The conflict has left 400,000 people dead, over 13 million in need of humanitarian assistance and more than five million Syrian refugees displaced outside the country.

Jahier said these statistics were “a strong reminder of the need for urgency.

“The protection of civilians is a legal obligation and a moral duty as well as a matter of urgency,” said Jahier, calling for the international community to join the EU and the UN in their effort to garner political support for the UN-led political process and “the constructive engagement of civil society.”

Supporting High Representative Federica Mogherini, Jahier said the conference must shift the focus now to diplomacy and peace-making. “Without constructive political talks we run the risk of further escalating the human tragedy of millions of Syrians, including women and children,” he added.

“The future of Syria lies in the hands of the Syrian people and the EU should continue to work with Syrian civil society to promote democracy and human rights in support of peace and stability in Syria.

“There is no time to waste. As Europeans we know all too well that without peace, there is no life, only human tragedy. All actors meeting in Brussels today and tomorrow must earnestly show their strong support for the relaunch of the talks, work towards the improvement of conditions so that humanitarian aid reaches the vulnerable populations. The International community cannot tolerate the humanitarian chaos to escalate further,” Jahier added.

## About the author

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