



Department
for International
Development



Rt Hon Desmond Swayne TD MP
Minister of State

Helen Whately MP
House of Commons
London
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9th November 2015

Thank you for your letter of 15th October (your ref: HW/HW) to Rt Hon Justine Greening, Secretary of State for International Development, about your recent visit to Turkey.

I share your concern for the catastrophic humanitarian situation within Syria and the surrounding region and was thus extremely interested to hear about your experiences in the region. The generosity of the British public towards Syrian refugees has been laudable and I wholeheartedly welcome your efforts to learn about the humanitarian response.

The UK has been at the forefront of the response to the humanitarian crisis in Syria. To date, the UK has pledged over £1.1 billion, our largest ever response to a humanitarian crisis. This makes us the second largest bilateral donor after the United States and means we have done more than any other European country.

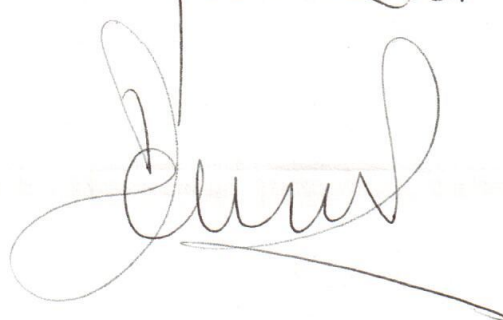
DFID prioritises its assistance according to where needs are greatest and the capacity of the host country to absorb such refugees. We commend the generosity that Turkey has shown to 2.18 million refugees fleeing the conflict in Syria. My Department is doing all we can to support refugees and vulnerable host communities within Turkey. To date, the UK has allocated £34 million to support Syrian refugees in Turkey. By June 2015, this support had delivered over 331,000 food rations, more than 112,000 medical consultations and at least 263,000 relief packages to those in need. The UK is also working in partnership with Turkish institutions on targeted projects to build their capacity to tackle irregular migration.

As you mentioned in your letter, the vast majority of refugees in neighbouring countries live amongst host communities. In Turkey, only 275,000 of the almost 2.18 million refugees actually live in camps. DFID recognises that as the crisis persists, these refugees are exhausting their savings and are increasingly in debt. Millions of refugees across the region remain in need of humanitarian assistance and protection. The UK Government's response throughout the region is therefore focussed on these vulnerable refugee and host communities, not solely those in camps.

We also recognise that simply providing for the basic needs of refugees will not be enough. We must give Syrians opportunities: allowing them to extend their time horizons, increasing the prospect of being able to stay close to home, and avoid the perilous journey to Europe. We are working with host countries to help them to expand job and education opportunities for refugees and to cope with the impacts on local services. By the end of June 2015, UK-funded agriculture and livelihoods interventions had reached over 127,000 people in the region surrounding Syria. The UK has also allocated £115 million to provide education, psychosocial support and protection to affected children in Syria and neighbouring countries. This support has enabled over 251,000 children to receive an education.

You suggested the use of safe zones to protect civilians within Syria. The UK will consider any option compliant with international law that might save lives in Syria. However, safe zones in Syria would be a difficult and complex option, for which there is currently no Parliamentary consensus in the UK. Experience suggests that so-called 'safe' areas can prove difficult to demilitarise and protect against all threats. In fact, there is a risk that they can become targets. For a safe area to work, all parties to the conflict would need to agree to its establishment. In the absence of such consent, this would require significant foreign military resource.

The UK is deeply concerned about reports of the radicalisation of young men in the region surrounding Syria. Countering Da'ish/ISIL and ending the conflict in Syria is the only way to bring an end to this threat. We are working with partners to pursue a political settlement that will bring an end to the violence and to prevent further overspill in the region. As aforementioned, DFID is investing considerable amounts in education for children throughout the region to prevent Syrians from losing hope and becoming disillusioned.

Yours Ever


DESMOND SWAYNE