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# CLOSE TO 12 MILLION SYRIANS IN NEED OF HUMANITARIAN AID FOLLOWING EIGHT YEARS OF CONFLICT

12-14 March: Brussels Conference for Syria and the region

**London, March 12, 2019:** Action Against Hunger calls on the governments gathered at the third three-day donor conference in Brussels, 'Supporting the future of Syria and the region', to combine emergency aid with building resilience in the war-torn country.

Following eight years of war, an estimated 6.5 million Syrians are food insecure and 40 per cent of the population spend a staggering two thirds of their income on food.

Thousands of Syrian widows and single women have become heads of their families, responsible for generating income for the home alongside maintaining an intense burden of domestic labour. It is also women and girls who often reduce their food rations when it is scarce at home. The diet in the poorest households is based on the daily intake of just bread, tea and sugar, leading to malnourishment. Amongst young girls, both early marriages and dropping out of school early have also increased.

"The crisis has not ended in Syria. Despite the reduction in general violence, hostilities persist and people continue to die every day. Even when the violence ceases, the situation will not change from night to day. Syria is a devastated country; eight years of conflict have destroyed markets, livelihoods, water, and infrastructures. Going back to the starting point will take time", says Chiara Saccardi, head of Action Against Hunger in Syria and the region.

### **Returns must be voluntary, dignified and safe**

Approximately 1.4 million Syrians, mainly internally displaced people (IDPs), returned home in 2018, although a large majority found themselves homeless or without health, education or basic water and sanitation services.

"We must bear in mind that when we talk about returns we do not refer to the five million refugees outside of Syria. In the vast majority of cases they are IDPs, a segment of the population that amounts to approximately 6.2 million people who have been forced to leave their homes, and who have more difficulties in accessing international aid," explains Saccardi.

The clearing of explosives is another the key condition for the safe return of people. Even during a cessation of hostilities, one in two people are still exposed to the risks associated with mines and remaining explosives.

### **Recovering access to water and basic sanitation is a priority**

Action against Hunger, present in Syria since 2008, has focused its humanitarian response on the provision of basic water, sanitation and hygiene programmes to the population.

"More than 70 per cent of wastewater is not treated, and waste treatment systems simply do not work, which remains a serious threat for public health. Recent outbreaks of Leishmaniasis could be just the tip of the iceberg," Saccardi warns.

"The rehabilitation of destroyed water networks should be a priority for international financing. The distribution of water using tankers is no longer

sustainable, and the work of restoring basic services needs to be addressed as soon as possible," he adds.

### **Aid should not be limited to emergency response**

"This third Brussels conference is an opportunity to demonstrate that the international community remains committed to the Syrian people," explains Jean-Raphaël Poitou, head of humanitarian advocacy at Action Against Hunger.

He also stresses that financial aid should not be limited to emergency response programmes, but should also start to integrate solid resilience programs to help support agriculture, livestock and income generation. The drought of 2018 has been an additional blow to food production.

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- Action Against Hunger is a global humanitarian organisation that takes decisive action against the causes and effects of hunger. We save the lives of malnourished children and work with their communities before and after disaster strikes. We ensure that everyone can access clean water, food, training and healthcare. We enable people to provide for themselves and we constantly search for more effective solutions, while sharing our knowledge and expertise with the world. We push for long-term change. We will never give up. Until the world is free from hunger.
  - In 2017, Action Against Hunger helped more than 20.2 million people in nearly 50 countries around the world.
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