

A young boy in a striped t-shirt stands in the center of a makeshift tent camp. The tents are made of white and brown fabric, and the ground is sandy and littered with debris. In the background, other people are visible, some sitting on the ground. The overall scene depicts a humanitarian crisis.

Supporting Syria and the Region

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CSO¹ Joint Briefing Statement Paper

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Matthieu Alexandre

On the eve of the fifth anniversary of the conflict in Syria, the situation for civilians is catastrophic. Such is the intensity of the violence inside Syria that, on average, 50 families have been uprooted every hour of every day since 2011: the number of internally displaced Syrians now stands at 6.6 million.

Warring parties continue, in flagrant violation of UN Security Council resolutions and International Humanitarian Law, to deliberately attack civilians and civilian infrastructure, including homes, markets, schools and hospitals; indiscriminately bombard densely populated areas; choke off desperately needed food, water and energy supplies to besieged urban areas; disrupt 4.5 million people's access to lifesaving humanitarian aid and services.

Widespread loss of documentation further challenges civilians' freedom to move inside Syria, hindering their ability to reach safe areas, access assistance, and ultimately seek asylum. Without a viable political solution to this conflict, conditions will only worsen, and the lengths to which the 13.5 million Syrians in need of emergency relief inside Syria will go to survive will become even greater.

The 2015 appeals for the Syria crisis – a record \$8.4bn – was less than 60 percent per cent funded in January 2016. Local CSOs playing a crucial role at the frontline of the humanitarian response struggle for funds. The asylum space and availability of basic protection and services such as health, education and livelihoods for the almost 4.6 million Syrians sheltering in neighbouring countries is diminishing, including for women and children who experience distinct impacts and needs.

Refugees face numerous and various challenges. Access to legal residence, registration and employment in neighbouring countries is increasingly restricted, and poverty rates are rising to unprecedented levels severely undermining their resilience. Further afield, safe, legal routes to Europe and elsewhere are too limited. More and more refugees are exhausting their financial reserves and sinking deeper into debt, exposing them to exploitation, driving impoverished parents to send their children into exploitative child labour, forcing desperate women and girls into survival sex and early marriage, and compelling some men, women and children to return to Syria or undertake dangerous journeys to Europe and elsewhere, at great risk to their lives.

The Syria Donor Conference in London is a crucial opportunity to raise significant funding to meet immediate and longer-term needs of all those affected by the Syria crisis, and maintain pressure on all parties to the conflict to protect civilians and respect International Humanitarian Law. At the same time, it should be recognised that aid investments, although necessary, do not absolve countries outside the region of their responsibility to resettle Syrian refugees. The conference should also support the key role of Syrian civil society, including women's rights organisations, in efforts to respond to and recover from the conflict.

We therefore call upon the Syria Donor Conference participants and the wider international community to:

1. Strongly and unconditionally condemn all indiscriminate attacks on civilian life and infrastructure, and press all parties engaged in violent conflict to uphold International Humanitarian Law (IHL)
2. Condemn siege tactics by all parties and demand unhindered access to humanitarian aid in line with, inter alia, UNSCR 2139, UNSCR 2165, UNSCR 2191, UNSCR 2258, and IHL
3. Commit to substantial, multi year, humanitarian funding, ensuring the UN's humanitarian appeal as well as other funding needs for Syria for 2016 are fully met, including more support for national CSOs

¹ CSOs (Civil Society Organisations) in this context is inclusive of national and international NGOs, Syrian NGOs and the British Red Cross

4. Commit to substantial, sustained funding to support job creation and livelihoods opportunities for refugee and host community men and women in neighbouring countries, working in partnership with host countries to eliminate economic and social inequalities, accompanied by measures lifting restrictions on employment
5. Improve protection for Syrian refugees, including by expanding safe entry to countries within and beyond the region, increasing in refugee resettlement (at least 10 percent of the total refugee population) and ensuring refugees are able to regularise their legal residency and registration.
6. Fully funding the UN's 3RP Regional Refugee & Resilience Plan 2016-2017, and increased support for women's organisations and children's services.
7. Ensure that all children and young people affected by the conflict are in education by the end of the 2016/17 school year, including by increasing funding for formal education systems and non formal education services in Syria and refugee host countries, and pressing warring parties to avoid attacks on or occupation of educational facilities
8. Redouble efforts to build an inclusive peace process, supported by the meaningful participation by men and women from Syrian civil society.

In addition, conference participants should publically and formally commit to an ambitious, long-term recovery plan for Syrian refugees and Syrian refugee-hosting countries in the region. Such a plan should comprise significant increases in developmental and multi-year funding pledges, the establishment of cross-sectoral partnerships between governments, civil society and the private sector (which can drive economic growth within host communities), the lifting of legal and policy barriers that prevent refugees from accessing legal stay, livelihoods opportunities and basic services, and investment in formal and non formal education systems, so that all children and young people can access safe, quality learning.

Countries within and beyond the immediate Syria region should ensure that refugees have access to fair and effective procedures to determine eligibility for international protection wherever it is sought, and commit to expanding safe entry for Syrians to their territory, including through a significant increase in the resettlement of Syrian refugees, the greater use of humanitarian visa and humanitarian and medical evacuation programmes, the flexible application of family reunification admissions, and private sponsorship schemes. Swiftly processing those with family connections can help avoid more people making the perilous crossings by sea to Europe.

In light of the particular dangers that women and girls face in Syria, and the challenges confronting female Syrian refugees in neighbouring countries, donors should ensure that the protection segments of the Syria Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) and 3RP Regional Refugee & Resilience Plan 2016-2017 are fully funded and prioritised, ensuring that resilience funding also reaches refugees and that there is increased support for local women's organisations.

Crucially, men and women from Syrian civil society must be at the heart of the discussions at the conference. After five years of spiralling violence, 2016 must be a year where Syrians are afforded the protection and dignity they have long called for but have been denied. Unless the international community demonstrates bold leadership to listen to and respond to their calls, the crisis of our generation will further spiral out of control, with pernicious effects in the region and beyond.

For further information contact **Louise Finan** at LFinan@christian-aid.org

Signed:

