



^S Foreign &
Commonwealth
Office



Department
for International
Development

House of Lords
London
SW1A 0AA

10 June 2020

Dear Colleagues,

Thank you for your Supplementary Questions of 13 May, following the Oral Question on Syria from Baroness Cox of Queensbury. I apologise that some of my answers were inaudible due to technical difficulties and write to clarify my responses.

Baroness Uddin referred to reports from The Conscious Movement that 10,000 women remain imprisoned by the Syrian regime and asked what representations the Government could make to secure their urgent release. I can assure you that the UK has long raised our concerns regarding detainees in Syria; and this remains a priority human rights concern for us. As penholders for the core group that run the Human Rights Council resolution on human rights in Syria, we are clear that there needs to be immediate release of all persons arbitrarily detained in the regime's detention facilities, including women, children, older and vulnerable people. We will continue to raise this matter at the UN Security Council, where we have also emphasised the important role women must play in finding a long term solution to the conflict.

Lord Green of Deddington, Lord West of Spithead and Lord Hylton posed questions relating to the humanitarian impact of sanctions, engaging with the Assad regime and lifting sanctions.

The European Union (EU) imposed sanctions in 2011 in response to the violent repression of Syrian civilians by the Assad regime and its supporters. These sanctions, which continue to apply in the UK during the Transition Period, are specifically targeted against those involved in the violent repression, Assad's supporters and those sectors supporting the war effort, to avoid adversely affecting the Syrian people and impeding the provision of aid. Despite the military successes of the regime and its external supporters, we do not believe that Assad is capable of delivering a lasting peace in Syria. Sanctions therefore remain a key lever to press for a genuine, negotiated political settlement that delivers for all Syrians.

Food and medicines are not subject to sanctions; both can be supplied to people in Syria. Humanitarian partners, including the United Nations provide these items through programmes within Syria. There are instances where food relating to these

programmes is produced in Syria, by a third party, which may be associated with the Assad regime. Making funds or economic resources available, directly or indirectly, to or for the benefit of those designated under the Syria sanctions regime is prohibited by the regulations. However, exemptions apply for humanitarian assistance and the Office of Financial Sanctions Implementation issues a licence to enable funding of such activity where it is satisfied this is appropriate under the sanctions regime.

The export, supply, financing or use in Syria of other medical goods including respirators and Personal Protection Equipment (PPE) is not prohibited by the EU Syria sanctions regime. These activities may however, involve individuals or entities or bodies subject to sanctions or relate to dual use goods, capable of use for military purposes. Licences are required for the export and supply of these goods to prevent them from being used to support the war effort, with applications considered on a case-by-case basis using the Consolidated Criteria. The European Commission is working with Member States to ensure humanitarian operators can easily access national procedures.

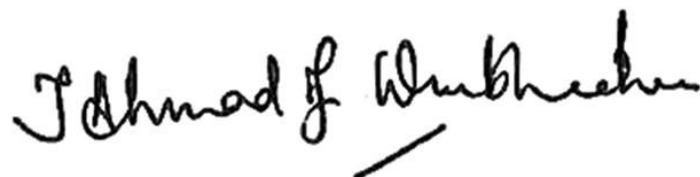
On reconstruction, the Syrian conflict has been one of the most destructive in recent history, and we are committed to supporting victims of this conflict. The Syrian regime is responsible for the devastation and damage to the economy. The regime has also seized land belonging to the Syrian people for reconstruction. Providing reconstruction assistance would suggest that we condone these actions.

A political settlement is required before the UK and likeminded countries can consider lifting these and other sanctions. We will also require the Assad regime to change its behaviour towards Syrian civilians, including ceasing its repeated breaches of human rights, and international humanitarian law.

Finally, I turn to the question posed by Baroness Hodgson of Abinger relating to Turkey and Turkish-backed forces cutting water supplies to 460,000 people in the Al-Hasakah Governorate. We are clear that water provision is vital, but especially so in responding to the risk of COVID-19. We have repeatedly raised our concerns with the Turkish authorities in Ankara when the water supply was disrupted at Alouk Water Plant. We understand that the facility has now re-opened although it is not running at full capacity. We will continue to monitor the situation and speak with our Turkish counterparts as needed.

A copy of this letter has been placed in the libraries of both Houses.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Tariq Ahmad of Wimbledon". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line underneath the name.

LORD (TARIQ) AHMAD OF WIMBLEDON

Minister of State for the Commonwealth, UN and South Asia

Prime Minister's Special Representative for Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict