Written evidence submitted by Tearfund

1. Summary
1.1 Christian relief and development agency Tearfund welcomes this opportunity to contribute to the International Development Select Committee’s inquiry on the UK’s development work in the Middle East, in particular the crisis in Syria. In February 2013 Tearfund launched its own emergency appeal for Syria and thanks to the generosity of its supporters, has raised over £2 million to support partners working through local churches and community organisations in Lebanon, Jordan and Syria to reach those in need. Assistance includes pre-school education as well as ongoing trauma care, providing emergency food, funding for accommodation and other everyday essentials for refugees.

1.2 The conflict in Syria has been described as the worst humanitarian disaster since the end of the cold war\(^1\). The scale of the response is hugely challenging as more than 2.2 million Syrians are hosted in the region, an estimated 84 percent of refugees living outside camps, placing unprecedented strain on communities, infrastructure and services in host countries of Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey, Iraq and Egypt\(^2\). The total registered refugee population in the region is expected to reach 4.1 million by December 2014\(^3\).

1.3 This submission by Tearfund recognises the role that the UK has played by providing one of its largest responses to a humanitarian crisis, and recommends that:

- The government continues to lobby other donors to **secure more funding for the international response** to the Syrian conflict, and should use the 2\(^{nd}\) Pledging Conference for Syria on 15 January in Kuwait\(^4\) to reduce the deficit in the UN appeal funds;
- The Geneva II peace conference remains a priority in the UK’s diplomatic efforts to **commit urgently to reaching a negotiated settlement that will end the violence**, through an inclusive and transparent political process. These diplomatic talks must recognise the complexities of the conflict; the impact that not only regime but also rebel controlled areas are having on civilians, especially those from vulnerable minorities;
- The UK works with the UN Security Council and applies its weight, authority and pressure to ensure the **Council implements the Presidential Statement on humanitarian access**; with the increasing needs inside and outside Syria all the parties to the conflict must allow unimpeded access for humanitarian organisations throughout the country; and
- Following the high-level event in November 2013 co-chaired by DFID for international action to protect women and girls from sexual violence in emergencies, including conflicts like Syria, Tearfund recommends that the UK plays its part to fulfil **meaningful engagement of and partnership with faith groups** in the analysis, design and implementation of its programmes and service delivery for the Syria response.

\(^1\) Antonio Guterres, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, interviewed by The Guardian [http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/apr/19/half-syrian-population-aid-year](http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/apr/19/half-syrian-population-aid-year) 19 April 2013
2. Challenges in gaining humanitarian access to affected areas:

2.1 Providing assistance to the 9.3 million people in need within Syria - 40 percent of the population, and the 6.8 million who are internally displaced remains a challenge for humanitarian organisations as there are severe limitations of where who they can operate with. For example due to the pressing security and safety concerns of aid workers Tearfund’s partners in Syria are limited to supporting about 3,000 people but this has largely confined to government controlled areas. Lack of access has undermined the ability of teams to conduct evaluations and monitor impact of the response. A humanitarian cease-fire would allow aid convoys to deliver assistance to communities which remain out of reach.

2.2 Parties to the conflict have the obligation, under international humanitarian law, to facilitate the effective and safe passage of relief convoys and humanitarian personnel in areas under their control. Yet these obligations are currently not being fulfilled, with many thousands of civilians cut off from food, water, medicine, and essential services as a result. Bureaucratic restrictions on assistance are being employed as a tactic in the conflict: visas are routinely denied for humanitarian personnel, registration for NGOs interminably delayed, and authorisation for many cross-line convoys into opposition-held areas arbitrarily withheld. All parties to the conflict have detained humanitarian convoys and prevented the safe passage of essential assistance. Failure of the parties to respect even the most basic humanitarian principles is adding to the suffering of Syrian civilians and exacerbating political divisions.

2.3 During her last briefing to the UN Security Council in December 2013, Valerie Amos, UN Emergency Relief Coordinator, reported “modest progress” with the Syrian Government on speeding up visa issuance and increasing the number of relief distribution hubs but greater efforts are needed to ensure real gains on unhindered humanitarian access⁵. Amos also noted that both the Government and the opposition had indicated who the interlocutors are for the UN to try to facilitate humanitarian access. However on some of the more difficult areas – protection of civilians, de-militarization of schools and hospitals, access to besieged communities and also cross-line access to hard-to-reach areas – no progress has yet materialised.

3. Meaningful engagement and partnership with faith communities

3.1 By the end of 2014, it is anticipated that an additional 1.7 million refugees will have been registered in neighbouring countries and the total registered refugee population in the region is expected to reach 4.1 million by December 2014⁶. With an estimated 84 percent of refugees living outside camps, increased outreach capacity is needed to ensure all persons of concern have access to information and counselling regarding their status and available services. Tearfund’s response in Lebanon and Jordan is focussed on supporting hundreds of vulnerable Syrians who are now living outside of formal camp settlements. The agency is working through local churches and community organisations at the heart of host communities. Some Syrians who have fled are living with host communities such as friends and relatives. However, as space is finite within homes this can mean up to 30 people living in one bedroom apartments. Many others are renting accommodation in the highly inflationary private housing market, or being forced to find what shelter they can in empty and derelict buildings, or in informal tent settlements. Some of the least fortunate can be seen sleeping rough under bridges, in parks and on the streets.

3.2 The UNHCR evaluation report\(^7\) noted the response system was initially stretched by the need to ensure sufficient and open coordination amongst the various partners in the response. While this has substantially improved over time, more needs to be done, including through attitudinal change, strengthened coordination expertise and the development of links with non-traditional actors, such as faith-based organisations. Local faith communities are often crucial operational partners assisting larger agencies. Practical examples of this include registering asylum seekers, community peace building, conflict mitigation, promoting sustainable livelihoods, and gender and child protection\(^8\).

3.3 The DEC Syria Response Review report\(^9\) also commented that the partnerships formed by the faith-based agencies (Islamic and Christian) appear to have a significant advantage in this respect, being able to tap into pre-existing local networks to identify and respond to needs as they arise. Tearfund is calling for the UNHCR and donors like the UK to promote meaningful engagement of and partnership with local civil society, including women’s rights groups, communities and faith groups, in the analysis, design and implementation of programmes and service delivery. This is particularly relevant when protecting girls and women in emergency situations from the very start of the humanitarian response, but also applicable to other vulnerable Syrians.

4. International commitments to fund and coordinate the crisis adequately.

4.1 In mid-December 2013 the UN announced that it would require $6.5bn (£4bn) to fund humanitarian efforts in Syria – as much as it will spend responding in the rest of the world combined. The UN’s sixth revised appeal for Syria and the neighbouring countries is the largest UN appeal ever and reflects the staggering scale of humanitarian needs. The task of responding to the immense demands being placed on host countries by this crisis is well beyond what can be achieved by host governments alone, or through traditional humanitarian responses. As such, the swift and substantial involvement of development actors and the commitment of significant additional financing to stabilise the situation are urgently required.

4.2 The UN estimates nearly three-quarters of Syria’s 22.4 million population will need humanitarian aid in 2014. In total, the UN is asking for almost $13bn (£7.9bn) to fund its humanitarian operations. Some $2.3bn (£1.4m) are destined for civilians inside Syria, while $4.2bn (£2.6m) would go to Syrian refugees in neighbouring countries. The latest call exceeds the UN's record appeal for $4.4bn (£2.7bn) in June, of which only 60 percent has been funded so far.

4.3 Donor governments – in the region and the OECD – must urgently give more aid now, and be ready to give more in the longer term as, tragically, the needs increase. Despite global financial challenges the international community must continue to rally to the aid of the Syrian people, as well as the neighbouring countries which through their generosity and solidarity are bearing an immense burden.


4.4 Tearfund welcomes the efforts of the UK to improve the overall leadership and coordination of the humanitarian response, for example when the Secretary of State for International Development initiated a working group of top donors and humanitarian partners to agree and monitor implementation of practical steps to improve the effectiveness of the international aid operation in Syria and the region. The working group’s meetings last year were a much needed step in the right direction, and Tearfund hopes that a meeting for 2014 will continue to drive forward progress and strengthen coordination.

5. Political resolution to end the conflict.
5.1 In conclusion, with an unprecedented crisis such as Syria it is critical that a long term political resolution is reached. Countries that are strapped in cycles of conflict and fragility are less likely to thrive and develop, and when there political dialogue fails the humanitarian efforts are hampered.

5.2 The UK needs to commit urgently to reaching a negotiated settlement that will end the violence, through an inclusive and transparent political process. Without a clear, coherent or robust plan for peaceful resolution, the international community must prioritise the Geneva II talks to kick-start such a process. These diplomatic talks must recognise the complexities of the conflict; the impact that not only regime but also rebel controlled areas are having on civilians, especially those from vulnerable minorities. The UK should use its diplomatic muscle to bring different parties together to discuss, agree and implement an inclusive and transparent political process.

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About Tearfund
We are a Christian relief and development agency building a global network of local churches to bring justice, transform lives, and eradicate poverty. Our ten-year vision is to see 50 million people released from material and spiritual poverty through a worldwide network of 100,000 churches.