UNICEF submission to the International Development Committee Inquiry:

The UK's Development Work in the Middle East

1. **UNICEF promotes the rights and wellbeing of every child, in everything we do.** Together with our partners, we work in 190 countries and territories to translate that commitment into practical action, focusing special effort on reaching the most vulnerable and excluded children, to the benefit of all children, everywhere. UNICEF is working in Syria and the surrounding region to ensure that all aid intended for Syrian children reaches those in need. Our growing field presence includes 84 staff inside Syria, including staff in place in Damascus, Tartous, Homs and Qashimli. In the complex environment of Syria, UNICEF uses multiple risk mitigation measures including independent facilitators in 12 governorates and regular partner reporting on programme results. Over 400 UNICEF staff members work in the region, including Lebanon, Iraq, Turkey, Egypt and Jordan.

2. An entire generation of Syrian children is being shaped by violence, displacement, and a persistent lack of opportunities; a generation that is scarred for life, and will not be able to maximize its potential. Five and a half million children are affected by Syrian conflict, including four million children in Syria alone and more than 1.2 million child refugees in Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, Egypt and Turkey. Inside Syria, basic social services have been seriously damaged. The collapsing health care and water systems are exposing children to infectious diseases. Polio has re-emerged in Syria with 23 cases now confirmed, representing the first outbreak in 14 years. Polio has been declared a public health emergency, and has seriously jeopardized the global eradication efforts.

3. Exposed to the horrors of war, many children have witnessed and been victims of unspeakable cruelties and are suffering psychological distress. The targeting of civilian-populated areas and the lack of protective measures taken by all parties to the conflict have led to a high number of children killed, injured or maimed. **International donors, including the UK, must prioritize the protection of civilians; call on parties to the conflict not to use weapons or tactics that unnecessarily affect civilian populations.** Additionally, the imposition of sieges which deny populations the necessities for survival are clear breaches of international humanitarian law obligations.

4. Home environments, and caregivers’ behavior towards children, have changed drastically. More children have become the sole breadwinner for their families, and there are strong indications of an increase in child labour.

5. **It is critical that the UK continues to support action on the monitoring and reporting of violations of children’s rights, including killing, maiming, abduction, sexual violence and child recruitment.** Funds invested so far have allowed UN agencies to document and verify information on grave violations against children through data collected inside Syria and in neighboring countries. On the basis of this
information, the Secretary General report on children affected by armed conflict in Syria has been issued.

6. In addition, in neighbouring countries affected by the crisis, it is estimated that the number of child refugees increased tenfold in 2013 alone. More than sixty per cent of refugee children are currently not attending school. In addition to poor nutrition, refugees face persistent threats of disease, such as measles, polio and diarrhoea. Children in both camp and non-camp settings continue to be vulnerable to exploitation, family separation, child labour, forced and child marriage, violence and abuse. There are also pressures for children, particularly boys, to return to Syria to fight.

7. The operating environment in Syria continues to severely constrain humanitarian efforts: fighting continues throughout Syria, the opposition is more and more fragmented, and sectarian violence is on the rise. It is vital that the UK, alongside other key international players, continues to advocate strongly for humanitarian access inside Syria. Unconditional and sustained humanitarian access must be facilitated to all people in need, including the lowering of administrative barriers for, and ensuring the security of, humanitarian convoys.

8. Although on occasion there are some limited improvements on the administrative and bureaucratic fronts to facilitate humanitarian access, little if any progress has been made on the protection of civilians. Access remains limited in besieged and hard-to-reach areas, where an estimated two and a half million people are located. Parts of the country remain completely sealed-off, including Moadamieh, Nubbul, Zahera, Yarmouk, Qaboun and Alwaer. Reports from besieged areas are dire: disease and a complete lack of basic services. Organizations have to negotiate with armed groups and local authorities to gain access for each convoy delivering humanitarian assistance – sometimes taking months or weeks to organize.

9. Throughout the country, there are schools and hospitals that are yet to be demilitarized, and medical supplies remain some of the most difficult supplies to deliver across lines. One in five schools are no longer functioning; and as a result, nearly 2.3 million children are out of school or attending school irregularly. The UK has an important role in calling for all parties to the conflict to halt all attacks on, schools and health centres.

10. UNICEF’s ability to stay, deliver and scale up its operations to meet the growing needs of Syrian children in 2013 was made possible through our donors, including the UK Department for International Development (DFID). Ten million people continue to benefit from access to safe drinking water throughout Syria. Throughout the sub-region, 2.1 million children were reached with education services and 948,000 children with psychosocial support. The largest-ever consolidated immunization response in the Middle East is currently underway to stop the polio outbreak, having already reached 25 million children with vaccination in seven countries, including a reported 2.5 million children in Syria alone. From 1 January 2013 to 7 January 2014, 46 interagency cross-line convoys allowed UNICEF and other agencies to provide life-saving supplies to nearly three million people in hard to reach areas.
11. We welcome the advocacy efforts of DFID teams in Beirut and Amman with traditional and non-traditional donors to expand their humanitarian support for Syria – pushing for sustained support to the delivery of essential basic social services, including water, sanitation, health and education. It is critical that DFID maintains this advocacy role in order to ensure that other donors continue to expand their humanitarian support. Since late December 2012, DFID has provided financial support to agencies working in Syria to enable programmes to scale up and meet the needs of the escalating crisis. In particular, DFID’s timely support of UNICEF’s water, sanitation and hygiene promotion programme enabled the procurement of life-saving chlorine supplies for the entire country, providing access to safe drinking water for millions of people as well as improved sanitation and hygiene services. DFID’s operational support has been critical in enabling UNICEF staff to travel to high-risk locations, establish sub-offices and implement and monitor programmes.

12. In 2014, UNICEF, with support from DFID, will continue to scale up life-saving interventions, with particular focus on routine vaccinations, special campaigns for polio and management of acute malnutrition. It is important to note that we have not reached hundreds of thousands of children with polio vaccination – and these children have been and continue to be the most vulnerable, most having not been vaccinated for one to two years. As the conflict in Syria moves from an acute to a chronic crisis, DFID and UNICEF need to adapt their strategies to the longer-term nature of the response, prioritizing operation and maintenance of water and sanitation systems, and strategic child protection interventions.

13. As the conflict enters its fourth year, we must look beyond humanitarian interventions. A tragedy of this scale has profound long-term consequences for Syria, the Middle East, and the world. This situation goes beyond sheer numbers, and the implications for Syria and its eventual post-conflict recovery are profound. In response to this reality, DFID, ECHO and USAID, together with UNICEF, established the ‘No Lost Generation’ initiative to bring together immediate and long-term investments needed to protect the children of Syria from violence, abuse, and exploitation; to ensure they have continued access to learning; and to provide them with coping mechanisms focusing on conflict resolution, peacebuilding and civic and community engagement. The strategy proposes practical ways to avert this possibility of a lost generation, with $1 billion in requested funding to expand access to learning, healthcare, psychosocial support and protection in order to restore hope for the future to millions of children. The ‘No Lost Generation’ initiative has been instrumental in providing a concrete example of a strategy that addresses both the humanitarian and development needs, calling for simultaneous humanitarian and development action.

14. We welcome the role the Secretary of State for International Development has played in the creation of the initiative at the General Assembly side meeting in September 2013 and later at its launch at the World Bank/IMF Annual Meeting in October. More and more Governments and organizations are becoming Champions for the children of Syria, mobilizing funding and engaging in advocacy efforts in these vital areas.
15. UNICEF and key partners launched the “No Lost Generation” public campaign on January 14, 2014, to raise awareness of what is at stake in Syria and a public engagement campaign called “Champions for the Children of Syria” has been created through a special website established at www.championthechildrenofsyria.org that tells the stories of children affected by the conflict, and shows how investments in children can deliver important dividends, not just for the current victims of the war but for the longer-term future of Syria and the wider region.