

Gifting of search and rescue equipment to Syrian civil defence teams

 gov.uk/government/speeches/gifting-of-search-and-rescue-equipment-to-syrian-civil-defence-teams

Location:

Parliament

Delivered on:

3 March 2015



The Foreign and Commonwealth Office has today laid a departmental Minute proposing the gifting of search and rescue equipment to Syrian civil defence teams.

The situation in Syria continues to deteriorate. An estimated 200,000 people have been killed since the war began four years ago, many of them innocent civilians. The Assad regime continues to use the most barbaric military methods and tactics available, including the use of indiscriminate artillery fire, chemical weapons and barrel bombs. The UK remains committed to doing all it can to promote a political settlement to end the conflict, to alleviate the humanitarian suffering, and to protect UK national security through countering terrorist and extremist threats.

In January and May 2014, my predecessor, the Rt Hon Member for Richmond (Yorks) (Mr William Hague), laid departmental Minutes before the House of Commons and issued Written Ministerial Statements setting out our plans to gift equipment to civil defence teams operating in opposition-controlled areas of Syria. No objections were

received to either gift and the UK distributed the equipment to civil defence teams along with comprehensive training packages. These defence teams have now saved over 10,000 lives by rescuing civilians trapped in damaged buildings, fighting fires and by providing emergency first aid. Our assistance has helped increase the legitimacy and capacity of local councils and supported communities in dealing with the aftermath of attacks. Other donors, including the US, Denmark and Japan, have also contributed to the civil defence initiative.

The UK intends to continue its support to this programme by increasing the communications capability and mobility of the teams, providing more medium-weight rescue equipment and equipping further emergency medical teams. The departmental Minute laid today set out our proposal to gift £3.5 million in equipment to Syrian beneficiaries operating within civil defence. The proposed list of equipment includes cutting and rescue tools, personal protective gear including helmets and goggles, stretchers, medicines and medical supplies, radios, firefighting equipment and 4x4 vehicles. The programme will also increase coordination between the Syrian Interim Government and civil defence teams, and provide civilian outreach for the civil defence teams, improving the resilience of local communities. The programme is expected to cost £10 million and will be funded through the Government's Conflict, Security and Stability Fund (CSSF).

The use of CSSF funds to cover the costs of the gift has been approved by members of the Middle East and North Africa Strategic Programme Board from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Department for International Development and Ministry of Defence. The gift has been scrutinised to ensure that the provision of this equipment is consistent with export controls and complies with our international obligations. Recipients have been carefully selected to prevent equipment being given to those involved in extremist activities or human rights violations. All our assistance is carefully calibrated and legal, is aimed at alleviating human suffering and supporting moderate groups and is regularly monitored and evaluated.

The Treasury has approved the proposal in principle. If, during the period of fourteen parliamentary sitting days beginning on the date on which the departmental minute was laid before the House of Commons, a Member signifies an objection by giving notice of a Parliamentary Question or a Motion relating to the minute, or by otherwise raising the matter in the House, final approval of the gift will be withheld pending an examination of the objection.

Further information

[Latest update on UK aid to Syria](#)

Follow the Foreign Secretary on twitter [@PHammondMP](#)

Follow the Foreign Office on twitter [@foreignoffice](#)

Media enquiries

For journalists

Email newsdesk@fco.gov.uk