

# Gifting of equipment to the Free Syrian Police

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The Foreign and Commonwealth Office has today laid a departmental Minute proposing the gifting of equipment to the Free Syrian Police.

The conflict in Syria remains catastrophic, with an estimated 200,000 people killed and more than half the Syrian population in need of humanitarian assistance. The UK will continue to do all it can to end the conflict through a political settlement, while also alleviating humanitarian suffering and protecting UK national security.

The UK is committed to working with the moderate opposition to help develop their capacity to meet needs on the ground and to reduce suffering and to save lives, thereby also helping reduce the space for extremists to operate. In line with this approach, on 6 February 2014, my predecessor, the Rt Hon Member for Richmond (Yorks) (Mr William Hague), laid before the House of Commons a departmental Minute which set out our plans to expand a UK-funded pilot project to train and equip Free Syrian Police officers, enabling them to provide community policing. I am pleased to present a further UK contribution of practical support to the Free Syrian Police, aimed at furthering their work.

The UK is working with international donors to provide training, technical assistance, maintenance funds, and basic equipment to the Free Syrian Police operating in opposition-controlled areas of Syria. The UK is also supporting the development of greater community oversight and monitoring of the police to help ensure that they are responsive to local needs. Through this support the UK is aiming to build community resilience and moderate governance to help counter the threat from extremist groups. Following the success of an initial pilot and subsequent phases, developing the capacity of community policing has become a core aspect of the UK's ongoing support to the moderate opposition in Syria.

The departmental Minute laid today sets out in more detail our plans to gift office and communications equipment, uniforms, non-armoured vehicles and other operational equipment to the Free Syrian Police. Subject to assessment under the Consolidated EU and National Arms Export Licensing Criteria, it is proposed that this will include a limited amount of controlled equipment, namely body armour and helmets (for conducting vehicle checks outside towns), CS spray (small canisters for individual personal protection), handcuffs (for making arrests), and night-vision goggles (early warning system for approaching regime helicopters).

The goods will be procured, distributed and delivered by an implementing partner carefully selected through competitive tender. The total cost of the proposed gift is up to £750,000, which will be met by the Government's Conflict, Stability and Security Fund (CSSF). The UK's assistance forms part of an approach coordinated with other donors that will help deliver the best value for money. Other donors, including the US, Denmark and the Netherlands, are also contributing on a similar scale.

The gift forms part of a renewed comprehensive UK programme of training and technical assistance worth approximately £2.5 million in the current financial year, which will be delivered by implementing partners. The training aims to build the capacity of the Free Syrian Police including through developing their strategy, planning and management mechanisms and enhancing coordination between Free Syrian Police units, as well as strengthening the relationship between police actors and local communities.

The Free Syrian Police are responsible for providing basic civilian policing in large areas of opposition-controlled territory. Police actors, local administrative councils and the National Coalition's Interim Ministers have all underlined to us the need to improve policing and security, and we have worked closely with Syrian partners and other donors to design a comprehensive programme of support.

The gift is being scrutinised to ensure that it 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. We have assessed the project for human rights risks, using the Overseas Security and Justice Assistance guidelines established by the Foreign Secretary in 2011 as part of ensuring these risks are effectively mitigated.

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**

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