



**Foreign, Commonwealth
& Development Office**

Rt Hon James Cleverly MP
Secretary of State for Foreign,
Commonwealth and Development Affairs

King Charles Street
London
SW1A 2AH
Tel: 0207 008 5000

Email:
fcdo.correspondence@fcdo.gov.uk
www.gov.uk/fcdo

Sarah Champion MP
House of Commons
London, Westminster
SW1A 0AA

11 October 2022

Dear Sarah,

Many thanks for your letter detailing your recent meeting with Syria Civil Defence (SCD). I am pleased that you were able to discuss the White Helmets' critical and lifesaving work in Syria. I similarly benefited from such briefings in my previous capacity as Minister for the Middle East, and was inspired by the work of SCD's volunteers. My department continues to engage frequently with the organisation, which – as you note – is one of FCDO's principal programming partners in Syria. Such exchanges help to inform our understanding of dynamics on the ground, as well as SCD's operational requirements.

The situation in north west Syria is indeed grave. We continue to condemn the brazen attacks which target civilians, perpetrated by the Assad regime and its allies. Use of krasnopol artillery and "double-tap" attacks show a particular disregard for the Geneva Conventions and symbolise the deliberate efforts of the Syrian regime and its Russian backers to kill and maim civilians. Disinformation efforts are commonplace and the SCD have been a prominent target of such tactics due to the incredible work they do - both saving lives and bearing witness to the atrocities perpetrated by Syrian regime and Russian forces.

In 2021/22, the UK spent £19 million delivering aid in north west Syria, as part of £49 million spent overall on humanitarian aid in Syria (we have spent £3.8 billion in total on the Syrian crisis since 2012, the UK's largest ever humanitarian response). Funding to north west Syria in 2021/22 helped provide 339,000 health consultations, facilitated formal education for more than 153,000 children, and ensured drinking water for 111,000 civilians. The UK continues to be one of the main funders of the SCD and has committed to providing £2.25 million in this financial year to sustain their core operations.

Additionally, the UK worked tirelessly with partners to secure the renewal of the UN cross-border mandate in July. While we are glad that aid continues to flow, we were deeply disappointed that Russia used its veto to cut the duration of the mandate's renewal, placing political games above the needs of some of the most vulnerable people in Syria. Our priority is focussed on ensuring the UN's cross-border operations are renewed in January 2023, but we are also exploring alternative ways to ensure aid continues to reach millions of people in the event of non-renewal.

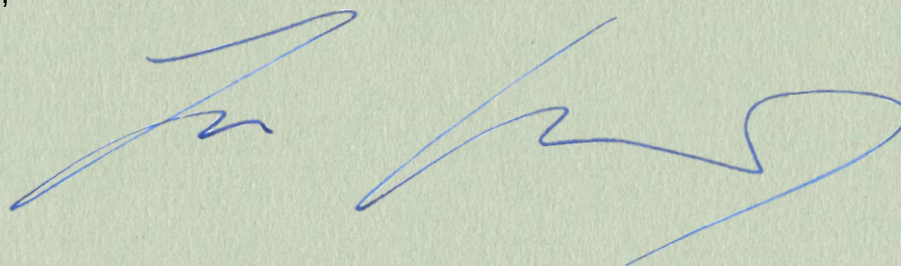
The UK is having to make tough decisions concerning finances and the FCDO is not exempt. As a result, the FCDO has changed the support it offers to the SDC and other lifesaving organisations. However, we continue to provide funding and ensure that we adequately highlight the lifesaving work of civil-society actors, using our position in multilateral fora to counter disinformation efforts, holding perpetrators of the worst atrocities to account, and pushing for a political solution to the Syrian crisis. This holistic approach does not minimise the importance of the SCD.

I have touched upon your queries above but for the avoidance of doubt I want to ensure I specifically address each of your questions:

- 1) There is not currently any emergency funding which can be allocated to the SCD. In previous years, where other programmes have had an under-spend we have been able to reallocate those funds to the SCD. We do not yet know whether that will be possible this year.
- 2) We have committed to funding the SCD until at least March 2024 as part of a multi-year plan. The amount of funding available in future years will be dependent on wide Syria programming budgets. I cannot speculate as to how much CSSF funding will be available in future financial years or how this will be prioritised amongst the organisations the UK Government funds in Syria.
- 3) We continue to consider all potential sources of funding which may be appropriate for SCD programming. We recognise the critical role humanitarian organisations play in Syria and therefore we aim to assist as best we can to ensure the SCD and other partners are able to continue with their programming. However, we must carry out due diligence and ensure funding streams are allocated suitably depending on the purpose of each pool of resources and the activities of the organisations being funded.
- 4) We are cognisant of the financial pressures on the SCD, particularly with winter approaching, and therefore UK ministers and officials continue to make representations to international partners. This includes engagement with current partners and attempting to bring new sources of funding on-board.

I assure you that the UK Government will do all it can to ensure humanitarian aid continues to reach those in need in north west Syria and that organisations, like the SCD, are adequately supported to continue their lifesaving work. Ultimately, the Assad regime and its backers must cease their attacks on civilians and engage in good faith with the UN-facilitated political process. The UN has our full supports in its efforts to end the conflict.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'J. Cleverly', written in a cursive style.

THE RT HON JAMES CLEVERLY MP
Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Secretary