

International Development Committee

House of Commons, London, SW1A 0AA

Tel: 020 7219 1223 Email: indcom@parliament.uk Website: www.parliament.uk/indcom Twitter: [@CommonsDC](https://twitter.com/CommonsDC)

From Sarah Champion MP, Chair

The Rt Hon Elizabeth Truss MP

Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs

Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

By email

9 November 2021

Follow-up: Escalations in northwest Syria and UK support to the Syrian Civil Defence

Dear Liz,

Thank you for your letter dated 22 September in which you addressed questions raised by my Committee, regarding violence in northwest Syria.

I am pleased to hear that the UK remains committed to highlighting violations of international humanitarian and human rights law in Syria and welcome the £12 million since 2012 that has been contributed to the gathering of evidence and assistance of victims.

In your letter, you said that:

“The UK is proud to support the White Helmets [...]. This financial year, at least £2.5m will be used to continue supporting this essential work.”

My Committee recently held a private informal meeting with the Syria Campaign and the Syrian Civil Defence, better known as the White Helmets. They articulated grave concerns about medical facilities, including the supply of basics such as oxygen. Despite this, we heard genuine stories of hope and resilience, including ‘Women’s Centres’ that were being run by the White Helmets providing essential services on awareness of unexploded ordnance to children, Covid-19 awareness, first aid and the early warning system. It was harrowing to hear that these centres are being deliberately targeted. The White Helmets also expressed concerns about uncertain funding.

With this in mind, my Committee would be grateful for your responses on the following:

1. Does the Government have plans to commit to long-term, sustainable funding for the White Helmets, and other humanitarian organisations, as opposed to one-year funding cycles? This would give huge stability and enable more effective planning.
2. What support is the UK providing to the World Health Organisation and other agencies to support fragile health infrastructure, systems and aid supply chains in northwest Syria?
3. What civil society initiatives is the UK supporting to promote resilience and economic empowerment, particularly for women and marginalised groups?

4. Given the situation exacerbated by Covid-19, will the UK provide additional support to Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) ahead of Winter?

I would be grateful if I could receive your response by 3 December. The Committee intends to publish your response.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'S', enclosed in a light blue rectangular box.

Sarah Champion MP
Chair of the Committee