



# Foreign Affairs Committee and International Development Committee

House of Commons, London, SW1A 0AA

Rt Hon. Jeremy Hunt MP  
Secretary of State  
Foreign and Commonwealth Office

20 December 2018

Dear Jeremy,

## Humanitarian Access in Northern Syria

As tensions escalate in Idlib province, humanitarian organisations continue to face challenges in meeting the needs of the three million civilians in the area. Meanwhile, the humanitarian community is preparing for another potential escalation in violence and the displacement of a further 700,000 people.

As you may be aware, despite the acute need for humanitarian support, many organisations are struggling to secure registration from the Turkish authorities to operate in those parts of Northern Syria most likely to receive people displaced by renewed violence.

I understand that the UK has supported Save the Children in successfully renewing its registration to operate in Northern Syria. This is very welcome news as it will ensure their vital work on education and child protection can continue. However, the needs of those displaced extend far beyond these specialised services and require scaling up in preparation for an impending emergency in the region. We are concerned that too few organisations will be equipped and authorised to respond as the situation changes.

In the past week alone, an additional 20,000 people have fled renewed violence in the province's southernmost villages. I implore you to use the full weight of the UK's influence with Turkey to encourage the timely registration of a full range of humanitarian organisations to enable an effective response to the impending crisis in Northern Syria. Or, alternatively, to urge the Turkish authorities to allow aid agencies to carry out humanitarian activities in Northern Syria irrespective of their registration status in Turkey, in line with humanitarian principles.

Yours sincerely,

Stephen Twigg MP  
Chair of the International  
Development Committee

Tom Tugendhat MP  
Chair of the Foreign  
Affairs Committee

Copy to: Rt Hon. Penny Mordaunt MP, Secretary of State for International Development



Foreign &  
Commonwealth  
Office



Department  
for International  
Development

21 January 2019

Stephen Twigg MP, Chair of the International Development Committee  
Tom Tugendhat MP, Chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee  
House of Commons  
London  
SW1A 0AA

*Dear Stephen and Tom,*

Thank you for your letter of 20 December to the Foreign Secretary on behalf of the International Development and Foreign Affairs Committees about humanitarian access in northern Syria. As your letter relates to the work of both the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Department for International Development, the Foreign Secretary has asked me to reply as joint Minister for both departments.

The UK is a leading donor to the humanitarian response in Syria, including the humanitarian cross-border response from Turkey into northern Syria, and is committed to securing unhindered, unrestricted access for humanitarian aid organisations to be able to reach vulnerable Syrians in need of assistance. To this end, the UK has championed the renewals of the UN Security Council resolutions for cross-border humanitarian assistance, most recently in December 2018.

I can assure you that the UK regularly engages with the Government of Turkey, including at Ambassadorial, Special Envoy, Ministerial and Prime Ministerial levels, in order to facilitate the registration of humanitarian NGOs that operate from Turkey into Syria. DFID and the FCO have engaged with the Turkish authorities in specific cases where there are registration and other permit-related difficulties, as well as more broadly to advocate for a conducive operating environment for humanitarian NGOs based in Turkey.

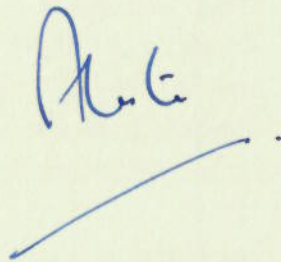
Minimising the restrictions on humanitarian organisations, including DFID's partners, enables them to continue using UK funding to help those in acute need. Last September I announced an uplift of £32 million for northern Syria – on top of our existing programming in the region – intended to provide shelter, clean water and sanitation, mental health services, and support health workers and facilities. Between

January and June 2018, our support in Idlib governorate alone enabled over 29,000 women and girls to access safe spaces, and provided 500,000 medical consultations.

I share your concern about a recent increase in fighting and the potential impact of a regime military offensive in Idlib. We have provided diplomatic support to Turkey's efforts to prevent such an offensive, and have repeatedly called on Russia and Iran as Astana Guarantors, alongside Turkey, to ensure that the ceasefire agreed at Sochi in September 2018 is fully respected. We continue to support partners in contingency planning and preparations for a potential offensive, and are in close contact with donors and our humanitarian partners to ensure our programmes continue to help those in acute need across the region.

I hope the above provides reassurance on our commitment to ensuring our partners are able to operate effectively in northern Syria.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'A. Burt', with a long horizontal flourish underneath.

**THE RT HON. ALISTAIR BURT MP**  
**Minister of State for the Middle East and North Africa**