

Aid Works

The Syria Crisis

A brief guide to contacting your MP

Date: March 2017

Version: 2

Contact Details:

info@aidworks.org.uk

www.aidworks.org.uk

Disclaimer

The content of this document is an accumulation of publicly available reference information. The information does not necessarily represent the views of Aid Works or its staff - we are providing the information openly to educate others.

Contents

1. Introduction	1
2. Contact your MP	2
2.1. Find and contact your MP	2
Step 1: Go to the MP finder:	2
Step 2: Go to the MP's contact page	2
Step 3: Get in touch and make an appointment.....	2
2.2. Agenda for discussion	2
3. Syria into the 7 th year: key facts.....	3
4. What can the government do?	4
4.1. What actions could the government take?	4
5. Useful links	4
6. Letter template	5
7. References	6

Figures

<i>Figure 1: MP finder website</i>	2
<i>Figure 2 Syria key facts</i>	3

1. Introduction

The purpose of this document is to provide essential information to enable you to contact your Member of Parliament (MP) with concerns about the Syria crisis and to press for greater engagement by the government.

Whether you are member of the general public, an academic or an aid worker, we hope it is useful in helping you to start a conversation with your MP.

The document has:

- Details on how to contact your local MP, and a letter/email template for you to use.
- Key facts about the Syria crisis to help in discussions with your MP.
- Options for proposed actions that the government and MPs could take.
- Links, resources and a reference list.

We have also provided the template letter as a separate word document to make it easy to use.

2. Contact your MP

2.1. Find and contact your MP

Who your MP is depends on where you live. If you don't know who your MP is, you can use your postcode or place name to search for their name and find out how to contact them.

Step 1: Go to the MP finder: <http://www.parliament.uk/mps-lords-and-offices/mps>

Search using your postcode or place name.

The screenshot shows the 'MPs' section of the Parliament website. It features a search box with a 'Search' button. Below the search box, there are two radio buttons: 'by keyword(s)' (selected) and 'or filter MPs by'. A text input field contains 'Postcode, constituency or MP's name' and a 'Go' button. Below this, it says 'Showing 649 out of 649 results for Name' and lists the alphabet 'A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z'. A table header is visible with columns 'Surname, First name' and 'Constituency', and a row starting with 'A' and a 'back to top' link.

Figure 1: MP finder website

Step 2: Go to the MP's contact page

The Contact Details section will show you how to reach your MP by post, email or phone.

Step 3: Get in touch and make an appointment

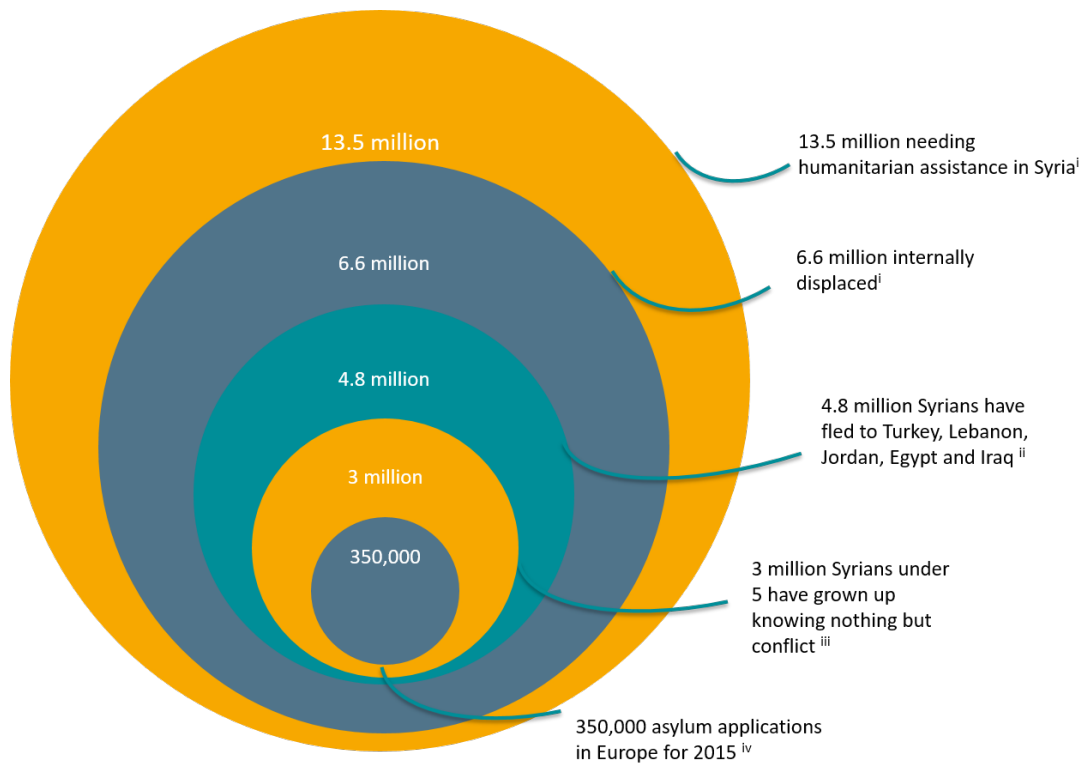
MPs usually hold surgeries once a week to give people an opportunity to meet them and discuss matters of concern.¹ Contact your MP by phone or email to make an appointment.

Alternatively, you can write to them. We have provided a template for an [example letter](#) in section 6 for you to use – please feel free to change the wording.

2.2. Agenda for discussion

1. Introduce yourself and explain why this issue is important to you (e.g. you're an aid worker, concerned member of the public, etc.)
2. Outline the conflict in Syria – how long it has been going on and the scale of the humanitarian crisis
3. Say what you would like the government to do. We've given some examples in [section 4](#).

3. Syria into the 7th year: key facts



i - <http://www.unocha.org/syria> accessed 15 December

ii - <http://syrianrefugees.eu/> accessed 15 December

iii - <http://reliefweb.int/report/syrian-arab-republic/war-enters-7th-year-unhcr-warns-syria-crossroads> accessed 10 March 2017

iv - <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-34131911> accessed 15 December

Figure 2 Syria key facts

The conflict began after protests in March 2011ⁱⁱ

BBC News

International humanitarian law is a set of rules which seek to limit the effects of armed conflict on civilians. It protects persons who are not or are no longer participating in the hostilities.ⁱⁱⁱ

International Committee of the Red Cross

Humanitarian agencies have been refused access to civilians in need with little humanitarian aid making it to those who need it.^{iv}

United Nations

4. What can the government do?

4.1. What actions could the government take?

At a basic level we suggest that:

1. MPs should attend all parliamentary discussions on the crisis in Syria.
2. All political parties should consistently push for a resolution to the crisis, and for the government to play a leading role on the international stage, whether the crisis continues to be in the news or not.

Below are six examples of actions that the government could take. You may not agree with all of these actions and may choose to advocate for just some of them. Some of them have already been presented to the government, discussed in Parliament and reported in the media.

1. Advocate that humanitarian access must be allowed for civilians to receive medical treatment, food and other essential needs.
2. Track and publicly report aircraft that are bombing civilians. This action has been discussed by MPs and activist groups in the UK.⁵
3. Support and implement humanitarian aid airdrops. Alison McGovern MP and John Woodcock MP have organised a petition to the government to implement airdrops. This is gaining traction, but there has been little response from the government.⁶
4. Implement a no-bombing zone to give an opportunity for humanitarian relief. The White Helmets⁷ are asking for this 'no-fly zone' action through a petition.⁸
5. Support the convening of an emergency special session at the UN General Assembly. On 1 December 2016 Reliefweb reported on a global civil society appeal to UN Member States for General Assembly action.⁹
6. Advocate that armed actors on any side of the conflict be held to account for violations of international humanitarian law.

5. Useful links

- [Human Rights Watch article](#) – containing facts and figures and an interactive infographic showing numbers of civilian deaths
- [DFID factsheet](#) on aid in Syria
- [European Union \(EU\) factsheet](#) – an overview of the EU's humanitarian response
- [MSF factsheet](#) on the background on the crisis in Syria
- [Reliefweb factsheet](#) on UN inter-agency humanitarian operations
- [Rethink Rebuild Society](#) and [Syria Solidarity UK](#) are organisations that advocate similar actions for the government to take.
- [Joint statement on Aleppo](#) by the leaders of Canada, France, Germany, Italy, the UK and the United States
- [UNICEF – Children's Suffering in Syria at its worst](#) – Press release 13th March 2017

6. Letter template

Insert your name

Insert your address

Insert your postcode

Insert date

Name of MP

Address

Postcode

Re: UK government's engagement in the Syria crisis

Dear **[name of MP]** MP,

I am writing to you as **[a concerned citizen/a concerned aid worker]** about the government's engagement in the Syria crisis.

The conflict is heading into its 7th year and around 13.5 million people – nearly two-thirds of the original population of Syria – remain in desperate need of humanitarian assistance. Some 6.6 million people have been internally displaced and 4.9 million live in besieged areas (United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, December 2016).

Since the beginning of the conflict, UN resolutions have consistently condemned violations of international humanitarian law, which is designed to protect civilians caught in the middle of hostilities. The UK government has publicly stated that it takes this law very seriously.

A recent report found that serious violations of international humanitarian law amounting to war crimes have been committed by all parties and made recommendations that all parties comply with their obligations under international human rights and international humanitarian law; and end all sieges and related strategies, including starvation and denial of access to humanitarian aid, that primarily affect civilians (UN General Assembly, Human Rights Council, February 2017).

In July 2014, United Nations (UN) Resolution 2165 expressed 'grave alarm at the significant and rapid deterioration of the humanitarian situation in Syria.' In December 2015, UN Resolution 2258 stated that 'the UN has only been able to reach 3.5 per cent of people in besieged areas with health assistance and 0.7 per cent of people with food assistance per month'.

Despite the media attention during the end of 2016, the recent debates on Aleppo and Syria have been poorly attended by members of all parties.

I ask that as my MP you will:

1. Take part in discussions in the House of Commons on this crisis and help to ensure increased attendance by other MPs.
2. Ensure that your party consistently pushes for a resolution to this crisis, and for the UK government to play a leading role on the international stage, whether it is in the news or not.
3. Advocate that humanitarian access must be allowed to civilian populations.
4. Advocate that armed actors on any side of the conflict be held to account for violations of international humanitarian law.

I would appreciate if you would reply to my letter, stating which of the above actions you will be taking.

I would like to meet in person to discuss these issues with you further/I would be happy to meet in person if you wish to discuss any of these issues.

Yours sincerely,

[insert name]

7. References

ⁱ <http://www.parliament.uk/site-information/glossary/surgeries/> accessed 16 December 2016

ⁱⁱ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-26116868> accessed 15 December 2016

ⁱⁱⁱ https://www.icrc.org/eng/assets/files/other/what_is_ihl.pdf explaining International Humanitarian Law accessed 15 December 2016

^{iv} <http://www.un.org/press/en/2015/sc12179.doc.htm> accessed 15 December 2016

⁵ <http://www.un.org/press/en/2015/sc12179.doc.htm> accessed 15 December 2016

<https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2016/oct/11/west-must-confront-russia-over-aleppo-syria-emergency-commons-debate-to-hear> accessed 15 December 2016

⁶ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/nov/27/aleppo-raf-aid-mps-theresa-may> accessed 15 December 2016

⁷ <https://www.whitehelmets.org/en> accessed 16 December 2016

⁸ <https://www.whitehelmets.org/en> accessed 15 December 2016

⁹ <http://reliefweb.int/report/syrian-arab-republic/uniting-peace-syria-global-civil-society-appeal-un-member-states> accessed 15 December 2016