

Australian Statement

Conference on the Syrian Refugee Situation: Berlin 28 October

Foreign Minister Dr Frank-Walter Steinmeier,
Minister for Economic Cooperation and Development Dr Gerd Müller,
UN High Commissioner for Refugees António Guterres,
and distinguished guests:

The Syria conflict is the biggest humanitarian, peace and security crisis facing the world today. Along with the recent events in Iraq – including the brutality of ISIL – it has shown the world that more must be done to end the now systematic violence and protect the millions of people affected.

Like others, Australia continues to call for a political solution in Syria. However in its absence, it is crucial that the international community continue to meet the immediate humanitarian needs as well as the growing development needs in neighbouring countries shouldering the effects of the Syrian crisis. As a priority we must relieve the suffering and protect the lives of the millions of women, men and children in the region affected by this brutal conflict.

Australia commends the generosity of host governments and their people, who have opened their doors to the 3.2 million Syrian refugees fleeing the violence. We recognise that this has placed an immense strain on their infrastructure, services and social cohesion. So we are encouraged by ongoing efforts to ensure that humanitarian and development assistance is well coordinated. Continuing to provide life-saving relief, while also building the resilience and self-reliance of refugees, will go a long way toward easing the burden facing host governments in the region.

We also pay tribute to the work of our UN and NGO partners who continue to deliver critical assistance to those who are in dire need, and often in the face of serious dangers. We condemn the targeting of all civilians, including the unacceptable killing of humanitarian workers and urge all actors to comply with International Humanitarian Law.

Australia has provided more than \$135 million in humanitarian assistance since the conflict in Syria began in 2011. Over half of this has supported refugees and host communities with education, health, shelter, protection, water and sanitation services.

It includes \$20 million provided early this year to the No Lost Generation strategy in Lebanon and Jordan to improve education opportunities for refugee and host community children. It is promising that since No Lost Generation was launched one year ago, the proportion of out-of-school children in the region has decreased from 70 per cent to 49 per cent.

I am also pleased to say that just last week Foreign Minister Julie Bishop announced that Australia will provide a further \$15 million for people in Syria and Iraq affected by the violence. These funds will be used to deliver shelter, food and much needed medical assistance, especially in the lead up to winter.

Australia has used its time on the UN Security Council to advocate for improved humanitarian access in Syria. We co-authored Resolutions 2139 and 2165 to gain better access to all people in need, particularly the 4.7 million in hard-to-reach locations. Since Resolution 2165 was adopted in July, we have seen a modest increase in life saving assistance including food and medical supplies reaching opposition-held and besieged areas. However, these gains are not enough and we continue to call on all parties to the conflict, to allow unimpeded humanitarian access including across borders and across conflict lines.

Finally, Australia has set aside a minimum of 4400 resettlement places for Syrian and Iraqi refugees this financial year. This is in addition to the more than 3000 humanitarian visas Australia granted to people from Syria and Iraq last year.

The Syria crisis is one of Australia's largest responses to a humanitarian emergency. This demonstrates that Australia continues to respond to humanitarian crises far away from our shores and we will continue to see how we can best help the people in need afflicted by this crisis.

We thank the German Government for convening this conference and bringing these important issues into the spotlight.

Thank you.