

**Berlin Summer Dialogue 2015 - International responsibility in refugee situations:  
Prevention – regional stability – peace work**

Key Note Address by Mr. Amin Awad, Director for the Middle East and North Africa Bureau  
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Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is an **honour for me to address this distinguished audience for the first time** at the Development and Peace Foundation. As an international forum for independent and creative thinking on peace and development matters, the Foundation provides the ideal setting to discuss what is possibly one of the most complex and pressing issues facing the humanitarian community and the world at large: International solidarity and responsibility sharing in refugee situations.

It is **particularly opportune to be in Germany** to discuss this issue, as Germany has provided leadership and vision in responding to refugee situations globally, and the Syria emergency in particular. In October 2014, **this city hosted the Berlin Conference** on the Syrian Refugee Situation. In December last year, **Berlin again hosted the launch of the Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan (3RP)** for Syrians addressing the needs of Syrians and their hosts in neighbouring countries, and the Syria Response Plan addressing the humanitarian situation inside Syria, which are the largest humanitarian appeal ever made. In addition, Germany received 60,000 Syrians that came to the country in 2014 to claim asylum, and also offered 30,000 places for humanitarian admission for Syrian refugees from the region. These actions are in line with UNHCR's strategy of encouraging the international community to share the responsibility with the major Syrian refugee hosting States by offering opportunities for resettlement or other forms of admission for Syrian refugees.

Being in Berlin today, **I want to commend Germany's efforts in responding to the Syrian refugee crisis**. It is through such concerted multilateral action and tangible expressions of solidarity that, together, we can continue to respond to this massive humanitarian crisis.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I want to address the issue of international solidarity and responsibility sharing in refugee situations focusing on the Syria crisis. Over the past years, the ever-worsening situation and severity of violence in and around Syria and Iraq have shaken the stability and security of the Middle East, and the capacity of refugee hosting countries and the international community to cope and respond to the deteriorating humanitarian situation and massive displacement. Every year since the onset of the crisis has proven to be the most challenging one yet.

The combined effect of the Syria and Iraq crises has **generated possibly the most terrifying spill-overs of internal conflicts into neighbouring countries in recent history**. With no political solution in sight, 12.2 million persons are in need of humanitarian assistance inside Syria, including 7.6 million internally displaced persons. Four years into the crisis, Syrians have become **the largest refugee population under UNHCR's mandate**, with close to 4 million in the region alone, and many more arriving in countries further afield, including in Europe through unchartered routes. Last year alone, more than 130,000 Syrians requested asylum in Europe, showing that the impact of this crisis knows no geographical boundaries.

Inside Iraq, the number of newly displaced persons has reached over 2.9 million, while there are over 180,000 Iraqi refugees in neighbouring countries. In 2014, Turkey and Jordan have witnessed an increase of Iraqi arrivals of nearly 400 per cent and numbers are projected to increase further, as the conflict continues.

These alarming numbers are no news to this esteemed audience, as the current crisis continues to be the focus of attention in a number of different fora and by a wide range of actors. They serve to remind us, however, of the fact that as an international humanitarian community, **we are addressing the human cost of conflict**, while the conflicts themselves rage on, with no end in sight. We are now facing the **worst humanitarian disaster of our times**, with increasing humanitarian needs, growing security concerns, and dwindling resources.

**How do we move forward?** The question is simple, yet the answer is complex and subject of much debate. In an attempt to put forward my own thoughts on moving ahead at this current juncture, I would like to **highlight a number of key considerations** in addressing the Syrian refugee crisis and which may help in identifying the way forward in the years ahead.

First, the **generosity of refugee hosting countries** has been extraordinary. The neighboring countries remain at the forefront of the crisis and continue bearing the brunt of the political, economic, social and security spillovers of the Syria conflict. They are the top donors to the Syria crisis and are providing a global public good. Local communities continue to show extraordinary solidarity even as the humanitarian needs continue to deepen. Despite all efforts and the significant support provided by the international community, Syrian refugees are becoming more vulnerable as their displacement is prolonged. In Jordan, two out of three refugees are living below the absolute poverty line. In Lebanon, well over half of Syrian refugees are living in insecure dwellings. Throughout the region, and as resources shrink, some refugees are resorting to a range of desperate strategies to survive, including child labour and begging. **Concerted calls for continued support to countries neighbouring Syria bearing the heaviest brunt of this responsibility are critical to preserving protection space in the region.**

Second, no country can absorb the **consequences of this crisis without severe economic and social impact** on their markets, infrastructures, and communities. In Lebanon, the total population has increased by 16% and GDP growth decreased from 10% in 2010 to 1% in 2014. The World Bank estimates that decreased government revenue collection and increased demand for public services have resulted in a total fiscal impact to US\$2.6 billion and that the overall decline in economic activities will generate a cumulative loss of \$7.5 billion. However, the consequences of the refugee influx are not all negative, and may in some respects have alleviated the economic fallout of Syria's conflict on neighbouring countries. **We need to collectively continue to explore avenues with the private sector to develop business models which include and benefit both refugees and nationals of host countries, and contribute to local economies and social cohesion.**

Third, we are increasingly facing a global crisis **with a displacement dimension beyond the region** with an increasing number of Syrian refugees seeking safety and protection beyond the immediate region. Syrians accounted for one third of the nearly 220,000 boat arrivals in

Europe last year, and they are increasingly risking their lives on unseaworthy vessels across the Mediterranean in the hope of reaching safety. The desperation which leads families to face this perilous journey cannot be described. **Widening access to protection for refugees beyond the immediate region through legal channels, including through the use of humanitarian visas, community-based private sponsorship, scholarships, facilitated access to family reunification as well as labour mobility schemes for refugees, to name a few other forms of admission, need to be further explored.** In addition to being vital to provide protection to refugees, such schemes could have a multifaceted effect, including by diminishing resorting to irregular channels for onward movements, by generating some hope for a better future as well as by enabling refugees access to income to support, through remittances, members of their family and communities in the region.

Fourth, against this background, the **principles of solidarity and responsibility sharing** cannot be overemphasized. International refugee protection is predicated on cooperation between States, which is both a fundamental principle of the international refugee regime, and a practical necessity in responding to common challenges. International cooperation is key to ensuring the international protection of refugees. Greater financial aid, including longer-term development and resilience-based funding, is needed to help ease the burden on neighboring states in supporting refugees. Increased solidarity and responsibility-sharing by other countries is also needed to allow Syrian refugees to find protection beyond the immediate neighboring region through resettlement and other forms of admissions. **There is a need for much stronger commitment to responsibility-sharing by other countries, allowing Syrian refugees to find protection beyond the immediate neighbouring region.** It is now that we must all come together and show the people of Syria and their neighbours that we continue to stand beside them no matter how hard it gets.

Fifth, it has become evident that the current **international aid architecture is no longer fit for purpose.** Humanitarian funding is no longer sufficient to respond to the scale of the needs. The totality of international humanitarian budgets reaches just 10% of what is available globally for development cooperation. There is an urgent need to examine the relationship between humanitarian and development funding, and the challenges related to current development funding structures not allowing for the needed flexibility to respond to humanitarian needs, especially in middle income countries. We need a new aid architecture that links support to refugees with greater support for the communities which host them.

**More development aid and budgetary support should be made available to countries dealing with large refugee influxes. This will require changes both in terms of policy orientation and mind-set, as well as some institutional adjustment from donors, agencies and international financial institutions.** However, it is a necessary adjustment that will allow for the stabilization of refugee host governments and communities through increased development support. The Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan for Syrian refugees and their hosts is a step in this direction, aiming at institutionalizing the linkages between humanitarian and development related interventions and holistic planning in this regard. But it is not enough.

Sixth. We need to **get creative and we need to work together.** Unprecedented crises require unprecedented responses. By its sheer magnitude and complexity, the Syria crisis has encouraged humanitarians to rethink the way protection and assistance are provided, changing the way we work and making technology our ally. Innovative approaches to humanitarian work should be expanded further to allow us to meet the challenges of the future and to ensure that our interventions are as efficient and as effective as possible. **At the same time, partnership, at all levels, including with civil society and the private sector, has proven to be key to widening our based of supporters and extending the impact of our advocacy for refugees.**

My seventh and last point is in my opinion the most important but sometimes forgotten: **we are talking about human lives.** Despite the magnitude of the numbers, despite security concerns, despite statistics, despite all, every number represents the life of a human being. Refugees and persons of concern remain at the core of our programme design and our participatory planning processes try to ensure that their voice is heard throughout our response. **Syrians are known to be resourceful and resilient in the face of adversity, and we must embrace and value this, and invest in their futures, because their future is the future of all.** The stability of the region and the aspirations of millions of individuals seeking to live secure and dignified lives depend on it.

Thank you for your attention.