

# **UN Makes Record Syria Appeal To Avert 'Greatest Humanitarian Crisis In Modern History'**

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The United Nations has launched the biggest aid appeal in its history, calling for more than £4billion to be dedicated to the crisis in Syria in an attempt to avert what it says is the greatest humanitarian catastrophe of modern times.

With no end to Syria's conflict in sight, the UN estimates that three quarters of the population – millions of whom have been forced to leave their homes or flee the country because of the fighting – will need aid in 2014. The UN said the impact had “exceeded all previous benchmarks”.

The Syria appeal accounts for half of a total funding plan of just under £8billion announced yesterday by Baroness Amos, the UN emergency relief co-ordinator, designed to bring humanitarian aid to 52 million people in 17 countries. “This is the largest amount we have ever had to request,” Lady Amos said of the worldwide appeal, adding that most Syrians “think the world has forgotten them”.

In the past two and half years of conflict, 2.4 million Syrians — more than a tenth of the population — have fled to the country's five regional neighbours, Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey, Iraq and Egypt. As the war intensifies, these countries are seeing up to 8,000 refugees crossing the borders every day.

So far, almost half the Syrian population has been left destitute or homeless in the conflict. A similar number do not have sufficient food, according to the World Food Programme.

UN agencies are attempting to provide food, clean drinking water, shelter,

education, health services and polio vaccines inside the devastated country, as well as assisting neighbouring countries.

Aid workers say that if international donors meet the appeal for 2014 – an increase of £2.45 billion on the amount they requested at the start of this year – the UN might just be able to cope.

However, even this year's smaller appeal has not been met, and is estimated to close at the end of December at only 60 per cent funded. As a result, when Syrians flee the country, thousands are being left to fend for themselves.

In Lebanon, where the government does not allow the official construction of refugee camps, Syrians have relied heavily on local host communities. But as the war reaches its third year, the burden has become so great that it threatens to destabilise the country.

Tens of thousands of Syrians in Lebanon are living on the streets. They can be seen sleeping on beaches, under bridges and in makeshift shacks made out of collected rubbish. Hundreds of thousands of Syrian children have been orphaned, or left suffering from psychological trauma, exposed to disease, or missing years of education. Unicef, the UN's children's fund, has increased its appeal by 77 per cent over past year, estimating that it will need £511 million for its work for Syrian children.

Aid agencies also complain of the near impossible challenges of distributing aid in a war where even humanitarian help is seen as a legitimate target for attack by both sides. Dozens of volunteer aid workers have been killed as they crossed front lines to reach besieged populations or murdered for the goods they carried. "The regime is the worst offender here in not allowing access," said Simon Henshaw, the principal deputy assistant secretary with the US Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration.

The UN began airlifting aid from Iraq on Sunday, because it was too dangerous to go by land, said Antonio Guterres, the high commissioner for refugees. "There is a tragedy in the plight of Syrian refugees, but let us not forget that they would have no place to go without the generosity of the neighbouring countries," he said.

Mr Guterres urged European countries to share the burden. "There is something fundamentally wrong when a Syrian family with women and

children that has fled this dramatic conflict needs to take a boat with high risk of drowning to get to Europe,” he said.