

## **20<sup>th</sup> March Evidence session “Building Resilience to Radicalisation in MENA”**

Following my appearance at the All-Party Group for the British Council “Building Resilience to Radicalisation in MENA” evidence Session, I agreed to provide in writing more detail to Lord Purvis question on which programmes in the region the FCO has either seen or delivered, which we consider effective. I would like to highlight three examples of UK support which are particularly effective – each funded by the UK’s Conflict Stability and Security Fund. These examples also demonstrate that the UK is building resilience to radicalisation through a range of activities from supporting local volunteers in Syria, to directly tackling Daesh propaganda, and through to supporting Lebanon’s armed forces protect their borders from Daesh incursion.

### **Syria – Syria Civil Defence**

One of the most effective programmes in the region is the project which supports the work of the Syria Civil Defence (also known as the White Helmets). It is a truly outstanding programme and the UK is proud to be a long term supporter through the cross-departmental Conflict Pool and its successor, the Conflict Stability and Security Fund. Our assistance had been delivered through trusted third party implementers and our support to Syria Civil Defence is part of a coordinated international programme of assistance. It had helped to provide the Syrian-led organisation of over 2800 volunteers with much-needed training and equipment. The volunteers include 62 women, who are trained in medical care and search and rescue work. To date the white Helmets have saved over 80,000 lives. They were nominated for the Noble peace prize last year and have been rightly recognised for their efforts to alleviate the suffering of the Syrian people. The Foreign Secretary met members of Syrian Civil Defence (and Free Syrian Police) on a visit to Turkey last year and said that “I am proud that the UK supports these organisations, which work in the toughest of circumstances to help the most vulnerable of people”

### **Iraq – Counter-Daesh communications**

In Iraq the UK’s Conflict Stability and Security Fund runs a strategic communications programme that has successfully contested Daesh propaganda. The programme started 2015, in response to UK and Coalition research on Daesh’s use of communications to amplify, and in many cases enable, its battlefield successes. Through capacity building and direct intervention, the programme has ensured that currently the effectiveness of Daesh propaganda in Iraq is largely nullified. Coherent local messaging that counters Daesh lies and promotes a positive future for Iraq is produced at a pace and scale above of that of Daesh. This programme has contributed to the UK being recognised as the leading Coalition nation on counter-Daesh strategic communication in Iraq.

### ***Lebanon – Lebanon Armed Forces***

Our support to the Lebanese armed forces (LAF) aims to minimise contagion from the Syrian conflict and combat the spread of Daesh. Since 2012 the UK has been assisting the LAF, through the Rapid Land Border Security Assistance Project, to establish and mentor the LAF Land Border Regiments (LBRs). Lebanon faces a number of budgetary pressures, including the cost of hosting 1.5 million Syrian refugees, and would be unable to fund the LBRs without UK support. This project is the main pillar of our defence co-operation with Lebanon and our efforts to protect stability in the region. The mission of the LBRs is to observe,

identify, deter and deny activities by illegal armed actors in the near border areas, in line with agreed international human rights standards. LBR infrastructure and personnel were critical in supporting the LAF in blocking the advance of Daesh into Lebanese territory in August 2014, and continue to play a crucial role in repelling attacks on Lebanon from Daesh and other terrorist organisations.

Our total commitment to the LAF border programme is now approximately £50m, and to the LAF overall it is £61.5m since 2012. By 2019 we will have trained almost 11,000 soldiers in specialist skills such as observation, camera use and driving, as well as essential infantry skills and techniques for urban and rural security operations across Lebanon. By April 2017 the UK will have delivered 320 Land Rovers, 3300 sets of body armour, a secure radio communication network, 30 border watchtowers and over 20 Forward Operating Bases along the border.

### **Supporting Gender Balance in Education**

I also agreed to provide more detail in writing to Baroness Hodgson's question on how we pioneer a gender balance in education. On education in Syria, we have undertaken a gender study to determine the barriers facing girls and boys from accessing school, and facing female teachers and education professionals from accessing education jobs in Northern opposition-held areas of Syria. This will provide valuable insights through a report in June/July 2017 which will inform the design of our education programme for the 2017/2018 school year. At present we disaggregate data by gender, and have undertaken some very small scale initiatives to target vulnerable girls such as creating safe spaces for those who have been forced to marry early and have therefore dropped out of school.

In addition to political lobbying for greater inclusion of women in the Yemeni peace process by the parties to conflict, we have supported UN Women in developing the Yemeni Women Pact for Peace and Security (YWPACT). This Yemeni-led group advocates for greater participation and inclusion in the official peace process and for a more gender-equal approach in peace building and reconstruction. It also aims to provide this group of Yemeni women with skills and knowledge to enable them to play a leading role in the peace process. In the year since the UK provided funding, the project has helped YWPACT to grow in size and stature. It now has the official status of a consultative body for the UN Secretary General's Special Envoy for Yemen, and a delegation of Yemeni women travelled to UN-led peace talks in Kuwait. Although the conflict parties remain somewhat resistant to a gender-equal approach to peace talks, and more work needs to be done, this has had the success of getting greater female participation on the agenda.

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