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Earthquakes in Turkey and Syria:

One year has now passed since the destructive earthquakes that hit Turkey and Syria on 6 February 2023 that sadly affected 8.8 million people, left 6000 people dead and 12,000 injured in Syria alone. My deepest condolences to those who continue to be affected by this tragedy.

The UN Humanitarian Chief commemorated the one year anniversary with the acknowledgement that in the north-west of Syria, more than 43,000 people who were displaced by the earthquakes have still not returned home. An estimated 80 percent of the Syrian population will require some form of humanitarian assistance in 2024.

Prior to the earthquakes, the Syrian population had experienced 12 years of conflict and many people already needed humanitarian assistance. I commend those in Syria undertaking this vital work, such as the white helmets who do so in truly difficult conditions. Local partners are the best placed to quickly and effectively meet needs on the ground. The influence of Russia, the Assad regime and other extremist organisations in regions that have been affected by the earthquake has unfortunately made the situation more complex. The UN has been permitted to deliver humanitarian aid into Syria through the Bab al-Salam and Al-Ra'i crossings with Turkey until 13 May.

The UK committed up to £43 million to support the response to the earthquakes in Syria and Turkey. Following this emergency response, it has said that it will continue to provide lifesaving and life-sustaining assistance and invest in early recovery activities. It has acknowledged that the overall need for humanitarian assistance in Syria last year was not met with the required funding. I believe that the short-sighted cuts to aid in 2021 left the UK with a limited ability to respond to new emergencies like this. I therefore support working towards restoring UK aid back to the 0.7% target as soon as the fiscal situation allows.

As attention diverts to other crises, we cannot lose sight of the situation in Turkey and Syria. I believe that when an international humanitarian emergency, such as this, arises, Britain must play a role in creating a long-term plan to address the long-term food, infrastructure, water, health and sanitation impacts.

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