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Caritas MONA and Caritas Europa joint statement on the 6<sup>th</sup> Brussels pledging Conference for Syria

## **Syria must not be forgotten. After 11 years of protracted crisis, hunger is growing, and people are losing hope.**

On 9-10 May, representatives of donors, refugee-host states, UN agencies and NGOs meet for the sixth Brussels Conference on “[Supporting the future of Syria and the region](#)”. Caritas Europa and Caritas Middle East and North Africa (MONA) believe that the Conference must send a strong message of hope and resilience to the Syrian people. We hope that those participating will seize the opportunity to do so.

In Syria, more than two thirds of the population are in severe and acute need of humanitarian assistance. Over 90% of people live below the world poverty line due to the global economic recession caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the impact of sanctions and the political and economic crisis in Lebanon. The purchasing power of the Syrian population has been eroded heavily with an increase in prices related to high inflation rates and currency depreciation. Even before the impact of the conflict in Ukraine, prices of staple foods doubled in 2021 and 55% of the population was estimated to be food insecure. Syria ranked among the ten most food insecure countries globally by mid-2021.

Only one in four children are adequately nourished. Further price rises for staple foods and fuel are now being seen as the Ukraine conflict continues. This will have catastrophic consequences: in 2021 three quarters of households were unable to meet their basic needs and average household income only met half of expenses, a decline from 80% in 2020. Refugee hosting contexts have also been impacted. This is evident in Lebanon, with food inflation exceeding 400 percent since 2019, and prices of diesel and petrol also skyrocketing.

Inside Syria, roughly one in two people are living in areas contaminated with explosive devices which continue to injure and kill civilians. Half of them are children. 4.2 million people in need are disabled, mostly as result of the violent conflict. Syria now has one of the highest disability rates globally. There is a lack of essential medicines, as well as medical equipment and supplies, in particular for cancer treatments. More than 50% of healthcare workers have left the country and migration and brain drain in all sectors continues. In refugee hosting contexts, UNHCR estimates that over a million refugees have little or no financial resources; in Lebanon, for example, nine out of ten live in extreme poverty.

Last year, less than 50% of the required funding for inside Syria was provided, leaving huge gaps in the response capacity for humanitarian needs that continue to exist. This year in Lebanon, for example, UNHCR has only been able to secure 13% of its 534m dollar budget for the year, and the impact of the conflict in Ukraine is sure to increase this need. Moreover, inadequate donor support to refugee hosting countries is contributing to political pressures, impacting on the asylum space for refugees.

In view of these trends and based on dialogue with our members and their local partners, Caritas MONA and Caritas Europa outline the following recommendations to all ministers and policymakers participating in the sixth Brussels Conference on “Supporting the future of Syria and the region”:

1. Increase commitments and scale up resources to proportionately and adequately respond to the increasing humanitarian needs of the people of Syria and the region,

notwithstanding the proliferation of humanitarian crises around the world, including in Ukraine.

2. Ensure the empowerment, funding, capacity strengthening and representation of civil society (local NGOs and faith-based organisations) present on the ground. These organisations have the most accurate and comprehensive understanding of their communities, the challenges and opportunities of the humanitarian response in Syria. Priorities raised by local Caritas member organisations include the importance of a systematic approach to cascading overhead costs support and flexible, multi-year funding to local organisations. In addition, donors, UN agencies and international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) should commit to systematically participate in localisation dialogue processes being implemented in Lebanon, Jordan, northwest Syria and elsewhere. These fora provide a space in which national and local NGOs raise their priority recommendations regarding opportunities and barriers to progress on quality partnerships and localisation. Structured processes of dialogue and action should be established so that by this time next year, donors, UN agencies and INGOs can explain their progress on localisation priorities.
3. Integrate emergency interventions with early recovery programming (food security and livelihoods) to make them more sustainable and effective. Despite challenges, NGOs – including local faith-based organisations – are able to deliver programming that supports Syrian people to not just be dependent on basic hand-outs, but to undertake agricultural livelihoods, micro-enterprises, rehabilitate their homes and other approaches that support their dignity and resilience.
4. Promote and strengthen protection interventions to ensure protection mainstreaming, safeguarding and accountability to affected populations. In particular, donor governments and the international community should work with relevant UN agencies, host countries and Syrian local authorities to encourage and ensure that any returns of Syrian refugees are voluntary, informed, dignified and safe, and implemented in accordance with International Refugee Law and standards.
5. Address the impact of sanctions, counterterrorism measures and bank de-risking, which hinder the access to the population as well as the quality and timely delivery of aid. This can happen by putting in place effective, transparent and simplified procedures to access humanitarian exemptions. Moreover, an independent assessment of the negative consequences of sanctions on the lives and dignity of civilians should be conducted to reduce their impact, and where possible, remove them.
6. Redouble and continue political efforts both to address the root causes of the ongoing violence and conflict in Syria and to avoid further suffering and destruction. Respect of human rights must be at the heart of this, and Syrian civil society must be supported to have a voice and meaningful participation in the political process.

For more information, please contact:

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