

Where now for aid to Syria and what role for Britain?

Monday 23rd September

17:30-19:00

The Sandringham Room

The Hilton Metropole Hotel

Event details

Event time: 17:30

Please arrive at: 17:20

Date: Monday 23rd September

Location: The Sandringham Room, The Hilton Metropole Hotel

Setup: Panel sat at a front table with five seats. Radio microphones and one roving microphones for audience questions.

Event Format

The *New Statesman* and Islamic Relief are proud to present this panel event at the Labour Party conference.

Becky Slack, supplements editor of the *New Statesman*, will welcome everyone to the event and briefly introduce the speakers. Rushanara Ali MP will be invited to speak first, giving her thoughts on the issues. She will be followed by each of the speakers who are invited to give their own thoughts on the issues. Each speaker will have up to five minutes to address the panel and the audience. The discussion between the panel members will last thirty minutes, to be followed by twenty minutes for questions from the audience, finishing at 18:30 with an additional half an hour reception.

Event Focus

The Syrian conflict has brought untold suffering to millions of people. Some 100,000 are dead, 400,000 have been injured and seven million have been driven from their homes. Two million of these have taken refuge in neighbouring countries, placing a huge strain on the relief operation in Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey and Iraq in particular.

Syrian refugees often face a long wait to register for assistance, and underfunding of UN appeals means aid organisations have to be selective about who gets some forms of help. The most vulnerable are prioritised – children, pregnant women, the elderly, people with disabilities and those with life-threatening injuries. The UN's refugee agency, UNHCR, has only received 47% of the funding it requested for the Syrian crisis in 2013.

All registered refugees receive food aid but there are not enough non-food items such as hygiene kits and nappies to go around, and medical provision is overstretched. Those in camps have temporary shelter but the camps are full to overflowing. Those living in local

communities face having to pay rent, and only some receive financial assistance for this because of underfunding.

Inside Syria international assistance is restricted by the extent of the conflict and the limits of the UN's mandate, which means it has to operate through Damascus. Many parts of the country can only be reached by cross-border operations, without official UN sanction or protection. Food, shelter and medical provision are more piecemeal and uncoordinated than they would be with more of an international presence. Agencies such as Islamic Relief are doing their best, but the rudimentary conditions in IDP camps are one of the factors contributing to the continuing refugee exodus.

How should the international community, and the UK in particular, respond to this huge humanitarian crisis? In the wake of the parliamentary vote against UK military intervention, the Prime Minister has vowed that the UK will 'lead the world' in getting humanitarian aid to the people of Syria. The UK has already committed £400 million in humanitarian aid – the largest total sum allocated by the UK to a single crisis. But how best can more of those affected inside Syria be reached, targeting aid where the need is greatest and staunching the unsustainable flow of refugees?

A 2012 research paper by American academics Wood, Kathman and Gent found that when outside governments intervened on behalf of rebel forces in conflicts between 1989 and 2005, the government's killing of civilians increased by 40 per cent (<http://jpr.sagepub.com/content/49/5/647.abstract>). So how should the humanitarian response in Syria adapt and focus if western military intervention goes ahead? What kind of humanitarian fallout might be expected, and how should the world prepare for it?

Islamic Relief wants to see better access and protection for aid agencies in the form of negotiated 'humanitarian corridors' and better support for the UN appeal. It ultimately believes, however, that there can be no humanitarian solution to a political problem, so it also wants to see a redoubling of diplomatic efforts to bring the warring parties to the negotiating table and initiate peace talks – as Presidents Obama and Putin pledged to do in May.

Fringe debate panelist Jehangir Malik, Islamic Relief's UK Director, has visited Jordan, Lebanon and Syria this year to see the organisation's work supporting refugees and displaced people. Fellow panelist Rushanara Ali has also visited the region recently, seeing the plight of refugees in Lebanon where numbers are now close to a quarter of the population of this small country.

It is against this backdrop that the panelists will discuss the challenges facing Syria. Questions to be discussed will include:

- Now that parliament has ruled out military intervention in the short to medium term, where does the UK stand in the international response to the crisis?
- What lessons can be learned from this humanitarian crisis to date?
- How best can UK aid and diplomacy be used to make a positive difference from a humanitarian perspective?
- How can the UK best contribute to international efforts to end the suffering in Syria by bringing about peace talks?
- What can be done to improve international humanitarian access inside Syria, and to protect aid distributions and aid workers from harm?
- How can donor countries that pledged support be encouraged to fulfil their promises?
- How can aid agencies best serve the Syrian people in a crisis that is increasingly complex to operate in, and one where there are signs of donor fatigue both from governments and the wider public?

Speaker biographies

- **Rushanara Ali MP, Shadow Minister, International Development**

Rushanara Ali is the Labour Member of Parliament for Bethnal Green and Bow. She was elected in May 2010 with a majority of 11,574, having defeated George Galloway's Respect Party.

In October 2010 Rushanara was appointed to the Labour front bench as Shadow Minister for International Development. As part of this role she is the Labour spokesperson on International development matters for Asia, the Middle East and North Africa, international finance and trade, private sector, jobs and growth, climate change, conflict and stabilisation as well as gender equality.

Prior to her election in May 2010, she was Associate Director of the Young Foundation. She previously worked at the Communities Directorate of the Home Office, leading a work programme in response to the 2001 disturbances in the north of England (2002-2005).

Rushanara has worked on human rights issues at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office(2000-2001); as a Research Fellow at the Institute for Public Policy Research (1999-2002) and as Parliamentary Assistant for Oona King, former MP for Bethnal Green & Bow (1997-1999).

She has also worked as the Research Assistant to Lord Young of Dartington (author of the 1945 Labour Party manifesto). She also helped him set up Futureiversity (formerly known as Tower Hamlets Summer University) and Language Line, a national telephone interpreting company.

Rushanara has seen Islamic Relief's work first hand in 2012 on a visit to Kenya, and has recently seen the conditions facing Syrian refugees in Jordan on a visit with World Vision.

- **Jehangir Malik OBE, UK Director, Islamic Relief**

Jehangir Malik OBE is the UK Director of Islamic Relief, an international relief and development agency with offices in over 40 countries worldwide. From his first volunteering position in 1991, he quickly progressed through the organisation, building both the UK office and those abroad – he was Development Director for the US office and Deputy Country Director in Afghanistan.

In 2006, Jehangir was appointed Director of Islamic Relief UK, and in 2010 was awarded an OBE by Her Majesty the Queen, in recognition of his 20 years of dedication and contribution to the humanitarian cause. During the course of his career, he has visited numerous field missions including Pakistan, Bangladesh, Afghanistan, the Balkans, Sudan, Kenya, Somalia, Chechnya, Iraq and Yemen.

Passionate about international development and eradicating poverty, Jehangir is often called upon to contribute to discussion forums and public platforms, including Lambeth Palace, Chatham House and the Frontline Club. He has been interviewed extensively on Islamic Relief's field work by the BBC World Service, Sky News, Al Jazeera and many others. He has accepted a number of awards for his work with Islamic Relief, including the Asian Award for Public Services 2009, the Muslim Power List 2010 and the Azm Award 2011.

In 2013 Jehangir has seen Islamic Relief's work among Syrian refugees on a visit to Lebanon and Jordan and in July he travelled inside Syria, visiting displaced people's camps and a makeshift hospital supported by Islamic Relief.

- **Becky Slack, Supplements Editor, New Statesman (chair)**

Becky is a supplements editor at the new Statesman. When she's not producing specialist reports on issues such as the health care needs of the Palestinian people, the future of the trade unions or political reform, she runs a publishing and communications agency that helps organisations of all shapes and sizes tell their stories more effectively. She also writes for the Guardian and the Independent among other titles.

Becky has an 18-year-career as a media professional with experience in print and digital B2B and B2C journalism; TV and radio production; fundraising, communications and events. Throughout this time, she has successfully relaunched one title (*Professional Fundraising*), launched another (*Charity Insight*) and edited several in-house publications.

- **Mehdi Hasan, Political Director, Huffington Post**

Mehdi Hasan is political editor of the Huffington Post UK and the presenter of al-Jazeera - English's The Café. He was a senior editor at the New Statesman and a news and current affairs editor at Channel 4. He is co-author of *Ed: the Milibands and the Making of a Labour Leader*.

- **Chris Doyle, Director of the Council for Arab-British Understanding**

Chris is the Director of the Council for Arab-British Understanding. He has worked with the Council since 1993 after graduating with a first class honours degree in Arabic and Islamic Studies at Exeter University.

As the lead spokesperson for Caabu and as an acknowledged expert on the region, Chris is a frequent commentator on TV and Radio, having given over 150 interviews on the Arab uprisings in 2012 alone. He gives numerous talks around the country on issues such as the Arab Spring, Libya, Syria, Palestine, Iraq, Islamophobia and the Arabs in Britain. He has had numerous articles and letters published in the British and international media.

He has travelled to nearly every country in the Middle East. He has organised and accompanied numerous British Parliamentary delegations to Arab countries. Most recently he took Parliamentary delegations to the West Bank in April 2013 and September 2012.

He is a specific expert on Palestinian affairs having worked on the issue consistently with regular visits to the occupied territories. In particular this has involved work on identity issues, the issuing of ID cards, security and human rights, all of which are relevant to the preparation of this report. Chris is a Committee member of the International Coordinating Network on Palestine affiliated to the United Nations. On 29th November 2005, Chris addressed the United Nations on the occasion of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinians. He also researched and wrote an educational pamphlet that accompanied John Pilger's documentary "Palestine is Still the Issue". He was also Chair of Friends of Birzeit University, a former trustee of Medical Aid for Palestinians and the Coordinator of the Joint Committee for Palestine.

Organisers biographies:

New Statesman

The *New Statesman* is Britain's leading, best written and most authoritative weekly political, cultural and current affairs magazine. For nearly 100 years its mission has been to provide readers with a rigorous examination of political culture as well as to amuse and entertain. Our provocative and acclaimed reports, columns and essays explore the issues that lead national conversation and are an essential source of information and analysis by senior

politicians, civil servants, national and local newspaper editors, business decision makers, heads of local authorities, trade unions, trade associations and almost every opinion shaper in the UK.

Islamic Relief

Islamic Relief is an international aid and development charity, which aims to alleviate the suffering of the world's poorest people. It is an independent Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) founded in the UK in 1984 by Dr Hany El-Banna, Dr Essam El-Haddad, Dr Mohammed El-Alfy and Dr Ihsan Shabib.

As well as responding to disasters and emergencies, Islamic Relief promotes sustainable economic and social development by working with local communities - regardless of race, religion or gender.

Directions

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