
BRUSSELS CONFERENCE SEEKS AID FOR SYRIA

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With Syria's conflict entering its eighth year, the EU's hoping a two-day conference in Brussels, from Tuesday, will help renew peace efforts.

The aim is to also raise billions of euros in aid.

"Tourab" - meaning soil - is a cultural side event that adds artists' voices to the debate.

One of the paintings on show is called "The Queue."

Cultural advisor Alma Salem explains its significance: "It is about saying that if the war stops, Syria will not need aid. If the fossil fuel based interests are not taking over 'the room' and if Syria is left to its natural environment, that is very fertile, Syria will manage to feed its own people."

The 85 countries and NGOs invited to the conference want to help the 13 million displaced in Syria - and five million refugees, mainly hosted by Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey.

International donors pledged around nine billion euros last year.

The EU is the biggest donor - contributing around 10 billion since the war started.

The bloc's received around one million refugees and an agreement with Turkey has been criticised.

There's a warning Syria's neighbours may start to draw a line.

"Europe also has to remain a place that offers protection and the right to asylum needs to be maintained within Europe," said Catherine Woollard, Secretary-General of the European Council on Refugees and Exiles.

"Otherwise it does not have either credibility and there is the risk that these countries follow Europe's path in trying to prevent access to asylum."

A relocation plan has also failed, with only a few thousand of the asylum claimers stranded in Greece and Italy being transferred to other EU countries.

Born in a village near Homs, Omar Al Tarsheh has lived in Brussels since 2015 - and has set up a NGO to help refugees.

He explained: "We help them with a place to stay, to find some houses or apartments. And also, we help them, for example, with how to create a professional CV which is going to help them to

find a good job, a dream job let's say."

As well as aid, the Brussels conference will try to push for a re-start of the UN-led peace process for Syria.

Kaynak/Source: