

Bomb damage in Salah al-Din, Aleppo. A report says estimated life expectancy at birth in Syria has dropped by 15 years since the war began in 2011. Photograph: Tass/Barcroft Media



World told to plan for rebuilding after £1tn Syria war

Postwar mistakes in Iraq must not be repeated, says report

Kareem Shaheen Beirut

Attacks against civilians in war zones across the world have grown more indiscriminate due to a myopic focus by the major global powers on fighting terrorism, the head of the international charity Médecins Sans Frontières has warned.

In an interview with the Guardian, Dr Joanne Liu, the Canadian physician who is president of MSF, issued a broad indictment of how modern warfare is conducted, declaring that the world powers had failed in their duty to uphold the rules of conflict, threatening a return to “barbarian times”.

“We are in a completely different way of rules of engagement in conflicts,” she said during a visit to Beirut. “What the Geneva convention and international humanitarian law brought to conflict was to mitigate war on civilians, and by not respecting that we are going backwards a hundred years. It’s barbarian times. I don’t



Dr Joanne Liu, president of MSF: ‘If the rules are to be changed we want to be told’

Sam Jones
Kareem Shaheen Beirut
Agencies

The war in Syria could cost the country almost £1tn in lost economic growth by 2020, according to a report that urges the international community to ensure a plan is in place to help reconstruct the shattered country when the conflict ends.

The study, by the international children’s charity World Vision and the consultancy firm Frontier Economics, estimates the war – which will enter its sixth year next week – is costing Syria £3.2bn a month in lost growth. It says even if the fighting were to end this year, the economic fallout is still likely to reach £485bn, with the figure rising to £915bn if it continues for another five years.

The report warns that without an internationally agreed reconstruction strategy ready to go when the war is over, the world risks repeating the post-conflict planning failures that have dogged similar efforts in Afghanistan and Iraq.

World Vision said that although the Syrian crisis has, according to UN data, led to the deaths of more than 250,000 people and affected the lives of more than 8 million children, its economic consequences were in danger of being overlooked.

The report says estimated life expectancy at birth has dropped by 15 years during the conflict, attacks on hospitals have left only 43% functional and half of Syria’s doctors have fled the country.

“Financial loss translates into human loss: lost education, lost health, lost jobs and lost opportunities,” said Tim Pilkington, chief executive of World Vision

UK. “The costs of the conflict are staggering. Unless we act now, this war won’t just affect a generation of children, but their children’s children. We must prepare the ground for peace now. The longer it takes to rebuild Syria, the greater the challenge and the higher the costs. The world must not repeat the postwar planning failures made in recent conflicts.”

In some of Syria’s most intense fighting since a truce brokered by international powers came into effect late last month, rebels fighting to overthrow the government of President Bashar al-Assad clashed with Kurdish paramilitaries in Aleppo at the weekend.

Jabhat al-Nusra, al-Qaida’s affiliate in Syria, fired about 100 shells into Sheikh Maksud, a neighbourhood controlled by the Kurdish People’s Protection Units in Aleppo, and clashes resumed yesterday between rebels based in the city and the Kurdish militia, according to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights.

Aleppo is divided between the regime and the opposition, but has been subjected to a major Russia-backed offensive in its northern countryside aimed at severing rebel supply lines to Turkey.

Despite the weekend fighting, talks aimed at reaching a political deal to end the five-year conflict appear set to resume, with an official from the High Negotiations Committee, an umbrella opposition group, saying it was likely to send a delegation to Geneva.

“Our inclination is to go,” Riad Nassan Agha, a member of the HNP, told Reuters. He said members of the opposition delegation would start arriving in the Swiss city on Friday, cautioning that the HNC

£915bn

Estimated cost to Syria in lost economic growth if the conflict continues for five more years

£2.3bn

Aid pledged by the UK, the second biggest bilateral donor to the region affected by the war, by 2020

8m

UN estimate of number of children affected by the war. More than 250,000 people have died

hoped nothing would happen to prevent its attendance.

The HNC’s coordinator, Riad Hijab, a former prime minister who defected to the opposition in 2012, said the bloc would decide by the end of the week whether to attend the Geneva talks, and said it had complained to the UN that Russian airstrikes have continued despite the truce brokered by Russia and the US.

Russia intervened in the war last autumn in an effort to preserve the rule of its embattled ally Assad. But the “cessation of hostilities” agreement has not prevented sporadic bouts of violence from erupting in the country.

World Vision praised the UK for leading the international humanitarian response to the Syrian crisis, adding that it would be a natural step for the country to show similar leadership when it came to producing a “historic restoration plan”.

The UK is the second biggest bilateral donor to the region behind the US. It recently pledged to double funding to the crisis to more than £2.3bn by 2020 to fund education, jobs and humanitarian protection in Syria, Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey.

The World Vision report also stresses the regional consequences of the crisis, noting the “severe economic shock” the war has had on the country’s neighbours.

Lebanon is estimated to have spent up to £700m on Syrian refugees between 2012 and 2014 – more than half of it on trying to cope with the increasing demand for electricity.

Jordan, which is home to more than 600,000 Syrian refugees, has suffered an estimated 12% drop in its population’s living standards as a result of the war.

Head of Médecins Sans Frontières warns of return to ‘barbarian times’

‘The elephant in the room is the war against terrorism - it’s tainting everything’

doctor of your enemy is not your enemy”. Liu said the lack of respect for the rules of war was a consequence of the involvement of members of the UN security council in conflicts around the world, as well as the counter-terrorism lens through which wars were being viewed.

“Today in Afghanistan, Yemen or Syria, we have four out of five permanent members of the security council that are involved in the coalition,” she said. “They have a job to preserve peace in the world. I might be naive to say that, but they’re supposed to preserve something, and today they are part of and taking active roles in those conflicts.”

Liu said that attacks on civilians and global crises would endure as long as the international community viewed them from a national security standpoint.

“If we continue to respond to crises through the sole lens of national security interests, we will continue to see hospitals being bombed,” she said.