

China should expand aid for refugee crises in North Africa

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Illustration: Luo Xuan/GT

Refugee crises in West Asia and North Africa have attracted worldwide attention. According to UN agencies in February, no fewer than 100,000 people suffer from starvation in South Sudan, an additional 1 million people are on the brink of famine and 4.9 million people are in need of food, agriculture and nutrition assistance. Meanwhile, Somalia's drought is threatening 3 million lives according to the UN. On top of that, the Syrian refugee crisis continues to plague Europe. Refugee problems have become a tough issue that cannot be solved by a single country, but is an area in need of global governance.

Now is the right time for China to expand its humanitarian assistance in West Asia and North Africa and more deeply engage in global refugee governance.

Major Western countries have decreased their contributions to the refugee crises. The US has abandoned its leadership role in global refugee governance. Hundreds of thousands of refugees have crossed into Europe since the start of the Syrian crisis. European countries criticized the US for only paying lip service with regards to its participation into the governance of Middle East refugees. US President **Donald Trump**

issued a travel ban targeting a few Muslim-majority countries which was overturned. He has also made cuts in the budget for foreign aid. All of these have an utterly chilling effect on the relations between the US and its allies in West Asia and North Africa.

The refugee problem has also become a regional issue. In West Asia, Saudi Arabia has maintained steady growth in its foreign aid amid the global economic downturn and falling oil prices, and was the fourth largest donor of foreign aid worldwide in 2014, following the US, UK and Germany. If measured by share of gross national income, Saudi Arabia was the world's largest donor that year. The African Union (AU) is also committed to playing a positive role in resolving regional conflicts. In January 2017 at the 28th AU summit, Antonio Guterres, UN Secretary-General, spoke highly of the openness of African countries in receiving the refugees and expressed his appreciation for the large number of peacekeeping forces provided by the AU member states.

As China is gaining strength, the country should play a bigger role in global issues, including refugee governance. After the outbreak of the South Sudan civil war in 2013, China contributed \$1 million to Africa's Intergovernmental Authority on Development to monitor violations of a ceasefire deal and \$2 million to the UN for refugee resettlement in South Sudan. China also kept its commitment to the UN in peacekeeping in the country at a time when other countries withdrew efforts. In October 2014, China announced it would contribute \$5 million in aid to Palestine at the Gaza Reconstruction Conference. China also offered humanitarian aid items worth about 30 million yuan (\$4.35 million) to the Iraqi Kurdish region in December 2014.

As such, China should take a series of measures to actively address the refugee problem in West Asia and North Africa.

First, China should promote changes in security relations with other countries in a timely manner. With continued expansion of China's overseas economic cooperation, China needs to protect its overseas interests in a more proactive manner and contribute to regional and global peace. In late 2015, China and Djibouti, after friendly negotiations, agreed that China would construct naval supporting facilities in Djibouti, which are aimed at "providing better logistics, safeguarding Chinese peacekeeping forces in the Gulf of Aden, offshore Somalia and other humanitarian assistance tasks of the UN," according to media reports. The move is of positive significance for maintaining international and regional peace and stability. On this basis, China should continue to increase bilateral military assistance, actively participate in multilateral peacekeeping and strengthen military intervention in the case of emergency humanitarian aid.

Second, China should enhance the level of global governance for refugees. The country needs to reinforce the flexibility of its foreign aid budget for increasing emergency humanitarian aid. Moreover, the country could promote the Public-Private Partnership model by facilitating overseas security companies to participate in humanitarian relief for crisis intervention and encouraging private capital to make investments in post-disaster

reconstruction. China should also empower its overseas business associations to strengthen their ability to coordinate emergency assistance resources and to directly communicate with governments of crisis countries, private foundations and international organizations so as to jointly organize refugee aid.

Third, China should actively cooperate with regional major powers. The country should bridge the Belt and Road initiative with other regional development strategies, such as Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 and the AU's Agenda 2063, and connect Chinese investment and assistance in West Asia and North Africa with the regions' development strategies, thus consolidating the foundation for economic cooperation and political mutual trust. Such an approach will not only help gain trust and goodwill in West Asia and North Africa, but will also maintain a balance between ability and willingness, interest and responsibility, and external powers and regional powers.

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