



التقرير اليومي



الخاص بأوضاع اللاجئين الفلسطينيين في سورية

The situation of Palestinian refugees in Syria



Former Gov't Official: Mass Graves Are Still Being Dug by Syrian Regime

- Increasing Number of Families Return to Yarmouk Camp
- Turkish Foreign Ministry Bans Renewing Visas for Tourists, Students
- Khan Eshieh Refugee Camp Grappling with Bread Crisis



Latest Development

Mass graves are still being dug in Syria today, filled with victims of the ongoing conflict and Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's regime, an anonymous whistleblower known as "the gravedigger" told US senators during a congressional hearing about the conflict on Wednesday.

Dressed fully in black from head to toe with his face and head completely covered by black cloth, the gravedigger spoke of the horrors he witnessed working as one of the civilian workers at a mass grave site in Syria from 2011 to 2018. While the gravedigger left Syria in 2018, he said he has spoken with others who fled the country more recently, and said they told him the mass graves are still being dug. The gravedigger gave a prepared statement through a translator.

Syria's civil war began in 2011 as a peaceful uprising against al-Assad. In the war that has now continued for more than a decade, an estimated 400,000 Syrians have been killed, according to the United Nations, and millions more have been displaced by the conflict both in and outside of Syria.

Before the war, the gravedigger worked as an "administrative employee at the Damascus municipality," but, in 2011, the "regime intelligence officials" visited his office and ordered him to work for them.

"When the regime asks for something, you don't say no. I was not prepared for the horrors of my duties," the gravedigger said through a translator.



"Every week, twice a week, three trailer trucks arrived packed with 300 to 600 bodies of victims of torture, bombardment and slaughter. Twice a week, three to four pickup trucks with 30 to 40 bodies of civilians that had been executed in Sednaya prison also arrived for disposal in the most inhumane way," the gravedigger said.

The gravedigger was able to escape Syria in 2018 and "follow his family to Europe." He testified before a German court in Koblenz about the horrors he witnessed. Because of other people he worked with who have recently escaped, he knows there are still mass graves being dug today, he said.

"My heart is heavy with the knowledge that many at this very moment are experiencing inhumane torture at the hands of the Assad regime," the gravedigger said via the translator.

The gravedigger recounted horrors of his time working at the mass grave sites. In one instance, a man who was dumped from a trailer truck with other dead bodies made a movement, signaling he was still alive.

"One of the civilian workers said, started crying, said that we had to do something," the gravedigger said. "The intelligence officer supervising us ordered the bulldozer driver to run him over, the driver could not hesitate or else he would have been next. He ran over the man in the trenches, killing him. As for the young man in our workshop who dared to shed tears over the victim of Assad's regime, we never saw him again."



"Although hundreds of thousands have already been murdered and disappeared and millions displaced, the worst is still yet to come. It can be prevented. But I beg of you do not wait a second longer. I beg of you to take action," the gravedigger said.

AGPS has documented the secret detention of nearly 2,000 Palestinian refugees, including women and minors, in Syrian regime lock-ups, where over 620 Palestinians also died under torture.

AGPS estimates the real number to be far higher due to the gag orders slapped by the Syrian government on the detainees' names and fates, along with the families' reluctance to report such cases over retaliation concerns.

Affidavits by ex-detainees have provided evidence on the involvement of Syrian government officers in harsh torture tactics, including electric shocks, heavy beating using whips and iron sticks, and sexual abuse against Palestinian detainees, in a flagrant violation of the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, commonly known as the United Nations Convention against Torture (UNCAT).

AGPS continues to urge the Syrian government to disclose the fate of scores of Palestinians held in its lock-ups, release the bodies of those tortured to death, to seriously work on halting harsh torture tactics, launch fact-finding probes into crimes of torture, and to bring those involved in such crimes before courts.



In another development, an increasing number of families have returned to Yarmouk Camp for Palestinian refugees, south of Damascus.

A number of returnees told AGPS that they have been able to reconstruct one room or, in the best of cases, two rooms, of their destroyed houses.

The families said they have been overburdened by exorbitant house rents in nearby zones. In Qudsaya town, a house is rented at 250,000 Syrian pounds, in an area where the majority of Palestinian refugee families lost their livelihoods.

In mid-February, Damascus Governorate said 2,000 families returned to Yarmouk Camp for Palestinian refugees over recent months.

The Governorate said 4,000 entry permits were issued to families wishing to return to the camp and retrieve their property.

Meanwhile, Turkish Interior Minister Suleyman Soyly said migrants who obtained touristic visas after February 10, 2022 will not get residency permits.

Students who ended their studies in Turkey should also go back to their countries of origin and will not get their visas renewed.

The minister said Turkey will also enforce stricter restrictions on the areas where foreign nationals can reside.

Soyly said, from July 1, foreigners cannot get resident permission in any neighborhood where the foreign population accounts for 20



percent of the total, noting that up to 1,200 neighborhoods will be affected by the new regulation.

The Turkish government first announced in February that foreigners, including Syrians, would no longer be permitted to live in areas where the foreign population exceeds 25 percent of the total.

Soylu also said the Turkish government will not allow Syrians to visit their families in Syria for the approaching Muslim festival Eid al-Adha, or the Feast of Sacrifice. The festival is set for mid-July this year.

Palestinian refugees sheltered in Khan Eshieh camp, in Rif Dimashq, slammed the Social Development Committee for turning its back on their calls to work out the bread crisis.

Civilians continue to line up for hours outside of the camp's sole bakery to receive bread loafs.

A number of Palestinian refugee families sheltered in the camp said bread supplies are being manipulated and sold on the black market.

Speaking with AGPS, a resident said cars parked outside of the local bakery continue to carry large quantities of bread to unknown destinations.

Over recent years, residents of Khan Eshieh camp have spoken up against the poor-quality bread sold in the area, saying it is unfit for human consumption and holding the government's quality control staff responsible for the crisis.



Living conditions in Khan Eshieh have sharply deteriorated due to the lack of financial resources and high unemployment rates wrought by the raging warfare. A transportation crisis has added bad to worse.

After more than eleven years of conflict, Palestine refugees continue to be one of the most vulnerable groups in Syria with immense humanitarian needs. The vast majority of families have been living below the poverty line.