



مجموعة العمل من أجل فلسطينيي سورية
Action Group For Palestinians of Syria

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الخاص بأوضاع اللاجئين الفلسطينيين في سورية

Daily report on the situation of Palestinian refugees in Syria



"Palestinian Refugees in Syria Struggling for Survival"

- Palestinian Refugees in Distress Coronavirus Second Wave Hits Syria
- UN Pledges Continued Support for Palestine Refugee Agency
- Trash Mounds Piled Up in AlSabina Camp for Palestinian Refugees
- Palestinian Refugee Husam AlRefa'i Forcibly Disappeared in Syrian Prisons

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Latest Developments

After ten years of conflict, Palestine refugees continue to be one of the most vulnerable groups in Syria with immense humanitarian needs.

Palestinian refugees in Syria (PRS) continue to launch cries for help over their deteriorating humanitarian condition due to the sharp decrease in the exchange rate of the Syrian pound compared to the USD and their lack of access to the local labor market. The price leap has also overburdened the cash-stripped refugees. House rents have also seen a striking hike from previous years.

The refugees continue to urge UNRWA and all other concerned parties to increase financial aid, help the displaced families return to their refugee camps, and provide much-needed relief services for Palestine refugees.

Over 90 per cent of Palestine refugee households in Syria live in poverty and 40 per cent remain in protracted displacement as a result of conflict and the damage and destruction of their homes, warned the UN Agency for Palestine Refugees.

The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) said in its 2020 Syria regional crisis emergency appeal that 126,000 Palestine refugees in Syria (PRS) are identified as extremely vulnerable; 89% live in poverty; 91% live in extreme poverty; and 80% rely on UNRWA cash assistance as their main source of income.



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UNRWA also said that 55% of PRS do not possess valid legal residency documents; 100% of PRS are in need of winterization assistance; and 86% of PRS households are reported to be in debt.

The majority of Palestinians sheltered in displacement camps set up across the Syrian territories have remained at bay from political calculations and frequently refused attempts by all warring parties to drag them into the raging warfare, saying their priority is to secure safe shelters for their children and families pending a just and lasting solution to their refugee plight and return to their motherland—Palestine.

Meanwhile, the Syrian government has set up a temporary hospital for Covid-19 patients at a Damascus sports complex in preparation for what the World Health Organization (WHO) said was a possible second wave.

The facility at Al-Faiha Stadium will operate 120 beds for people requiring oxygen, but has capacity for 100 more.

The health ministry has reported about 4,800 cases of Covid-19 and 228 deaths in government-held areas since March. However, experts believe the actual figures are significantly higher.

Last month, researchers in the UK estimated that only a fraction of deaths due to Covid-19 in Damascus had been reported for various reasons, including limited testing capacity.

The UN warned that community transmission was widespread, as almost 90% of new cases could not be traced to a known source;



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infection rates among health workers were rising; and shortages of staff and supplies were putting even more pressure on a health system decimated by years of civil war.

The World Health Organization (WHO) has said that limited testing capacity has hidden the scale of the crisis.

"A lot of cases are still going unreported, and the actual number of Covid-19 cases is much higher," the WHO's Syria representative, Akjemal Magtymova, told Reuters news agency last week.

A senior official at a Western non-governmental organisation was also quoted as saying there had been a "major and unprecedented spike in July and most of August" in Syria, during which 120 people were dying each day on average.

That figure tallied with the number of burials that took place at the Najha cemetery, the designated site for Covid-19 victims in Damascus, Reuters said.

Researchers at Imperial College London recently estimated that only 1.25% of deaths due to Covid-19 had been reported in Damascus, and that 4,380 deaths in total in the capital might have been missed as of 2 September.

Given that Damascus was likely to have the most robust surveillance in Syria, the findings suggested that other regions could have experienced similar or worse mortality rates, the researchers said.

The health ministry has not commented on the discrepancies.



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Front-line health workers have also accused the government of failing to protect them.

Doctors, nurses and aid workers have told Human Rights Watch that they face shortages of personal protective equipment (PPE) and restricted access to oxygen tanks, while in mid-August the doctors union reported that a total of 61 health workers had died since Covid-19 was first detected in Syria.

Over recent months, AGPS has warned of a projected outbreak of COVID-19 in Palestinian refugee camps in Syria. Though campaigns to help spread awareness among the camps' residents have seen the day, limited access to running water, pharmacies and medical facilities means displacement camps are more susceptible to the spread of the highly infectious virus.

Displacement camps set up in northern Syria are especially vulnerable as most hospitals and medical facilities have been bombed, rendering them out of order.

Along similar lines, the United Nations has pledged to maintain support for the U Palestine Refugee Agency in order to help it keep up its services for millions of registered Palestinian refugees.

In a daily press briefing dating November 9, Stéphane Dujarric, Spokesman for the UN Secretary-General, said: "A distressing announcement from our colleagues at UNRWA: The Commissioner General for the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA), Philippe Lazzarini, announced that



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the Agency has run out of money as of today to pay for the salaries of 28,000 UNRWA staff for November.”

“The Agency needs to raise \$70 million by the end of the month if it is to pay full salaries for the months of November and December”, added Dujarric. “Lazzarini said if additional funding is not pledged in the next weeks, UNRWA will be forced to defer partial salaries to all staff.”

The UN official warned that over the last five years, UNRWA cut \$500 million out of its budget by enacting efficiency and cost-reduction measures. This has included cutting staff, stopping needed repairs and investments in its infrastructure, increasing classroom size to 50 students per teacher, and reducing life-saving humanitarian assistance at a time of rising needs.

Founded in 1949, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) runs schools and provides health services as well as other humanitarian aid to an estimated 5.7 million Palestinians with refugee status.

Lazzarini was appointed to head the agency in March, after a predecessor was forced to resign late last year amid accusations of mismanagement that led key donors to snap shut their purses.

The developments only added to the agency's financial woes, coming after US President Donald Trump terminated US contributions to UNRWA in 2018.



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Washington had until then been providing the agency with more than \$300 million a year.

Around 40 countries initially helped fill the gap, but contributions have since diminished and the novel coronavirus pandemic has also taken a financial toll on donor countries.

In the meantime, residents of AlSabina Camp for Palestinian refugees, in Rif Dimashq, continue to speak up against the trash mounds piled up across residential alleyways and on the access roads to the camp, resulting in bad smells and the spread of life-threatening diseases and rodents.

Speaking with AGPS, civilians said the municipality and other concerned authorities have turned deaf ears to their frequent appeals to clear garbage under the pretext of unavailable equipment.

Located some 14 kilometers away from southern Damascus, AlSabina Camp has been gripped with an abject situation owing to the absence of humanitarian assistance, relief aid, proper infrastructure, and vital facilities. Frequent water and power outages have made the situation far worse.

In another development, 32-year-old Palestinian refugee Hussam Ali Al-Refai, a resident of Yarmouk, has been locked up in Syrian government penitentiaries for seven years.



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Al-Rafai was kidnapped by the government troops deployed at a Damascus checkpoint on May 15, 2013.

AGPS documented the secret detention of 1,797 Palestinian refugees in state-run penal complexes across war-torn Syria, among them 110 women and girls.

AGPS also documented the death of over 550 Palestinian refugees under torture in Syrian government lock-ups, including women, children, and elderly civilians.

Affidavits by ex-detainees 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 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.

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.



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