



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



"Displaced Palestinian Families Raise Concerns over Health Risks of Plastic Incineration"

- Residents of AlSabina Camp for Palestinian Refugees Denounce Uncleared Trash Mounds
- 900 Patients Receive Treatment at UNRWA Clinic in Yarmouk Camp
- UNRWA Facing Severe Financial Crisis
- Palestinian Refugee Walid Abdul Ghaffar Forcibly Disappeared in Syrian Prisons for 6th Year

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Latest Developments

Desperate for warmth, displaced Palestinian and Syrian families taking refuge in the substandard refugee camp of AlHusainiya, in Syria, have been burning their clothes and plastic materials to stave off winter cold after they failed to afford firewood and fuel supplies.

This has resulted in heavy smokes engulfing the area from all corners and engendering civilians', particularly children's, health condition.

Activists sounded the alarm over the health hazards emanating from toxic smokes. Scores of children have sustained costochondritis (chest inflammation) and bronchitis due to heavy smoke inhalation.

High unemployment rates and the absence of relief assistance by UNRWA and other humanitarian institutions have made survival quite difficult in AlHusainiya camp.

Offensives launched on the camp using MIG warplanes led to the death of dozens of civilians in AlHusainiya Camp and a massive material destruction. Bloody shootouts between the opposition outfits and the Syrian government forces culminated in the latter's takeover of the camp on October 9, 2013.

Along similar lines, residents of AlSabina Camp for Palestinian refugees, in Rif Dimashq, continue to speak up against the trash mounds piled up across residential alleyways and near school



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entrances, resulting in bed smells and the spread of life-threatening diseases.

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.

Meanwhile, in an effort to offer services to particularly vulnerable persons in Yarmouk, UNRWA has worked closely with the General Authority for Palestine Arab Refugees (GAPAR) to resume essential primary health care and disease prevention in Yarmouk.

As of 23 September, a mobile health clinic – one of the Agency's 25 primary health-care facilities across Syria - is visiting the camp every Wednesday to provide services from the yard of one of the destroyed UNRWA schools.

UN data indicates that the camp was established in 1948. Before the conflict in Syria, the camp was home to 22,600 Palestine refugees. It was taken over by armed opposition groups in 2013. The camp remained closed to civilians for almost four years and houses and infrastructure were damaged in the fighting. In



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September 2017, civilians were able to return to their homes. All UNRWA installations were in need of repairs.

The whole Palestine population in AlSabina camp suffered from displacement during the crisis and many families left the country and sought refuge in neighboring countries or fled to Europe.

During the conflict, labor opportunities have dwindled and the unemployment rate is still very high with very limited financial resources to help Palestine refugees restore their livelihoods. Like other areas in Syria, displacement, inflation, protection and security risks are among the main concerns shared by Palestine refugees and Syrians alike.

The camp is situated on an area of 0.03 square kilometers. Palestine refugees who came to Syria in 1948 first settled the camp. It also accommodates Palestine refugees who were displaced as a result of the 1967 conflict.

“We were able to treat about 900 patients over the past weeks in our clinic. Every Wednesday, we can receive an average of 65 patients, many of them with chronic diseases and respiratory infections,” said Dr. Imad Hamdan, an UNRWA doctor who works in the clinic. “I think many older persons avoided seeking health care before, as it was too difficult to access.”

“It is heartbreaking to see the conditions they are living in and it makes us very happy to see their sparkling eyes when they come to us”, he added. “It means a lot to them, not only to get health care, but also just to be able to talk. We are like a family to them. It is a



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tiny bit of normality that came back. We also believe that sometimes symptoms they show are triggered by fear and stress, after the horrors and atrocities they went through.”

Dr. Hamdan also highlighted the important role the clinic plays in awareness-raising and explaining preventative measures to avoid the spread of COVID-19 in the camp. “It would be a catastrophe here, people in Yarmouk cannot bear any additional burden,” he said. “What they need now is hope. Life needs to return to Yarmouk camp, I feel that our clinic is a start of this.”

Before the beginning of the conflict in March 2011, Yarmouk was home to approximately 160,000 Palestine refugees, making it the largest Palestine refugee community in Syria. Located eight kilometers from Damascus, it had a symbolic value for the Palestinian diaspora.

In December 2012, fierce clashes erupted in Yarmouk, causing numerous civilian casualties, severe damage to property and the displacement of thousands of Palestine refugees and Syrians. The camp was under siege from July 2013, drastically restricting the entry of commercial and humanitarian goods.

In January 2014, UNRWA had access to Yarmouk and conducted direct distribution to besieged Palestine refugees. The Agency continued distribution until April 2015, when armed opposition groups captured over 60 per cent of the camp, containing over 90 per cent of the remaining civilian population. This not only made UNRWA unable to carry out any distributions inside Yarmouk but also displaced most of the remaining 18,000 Palestine refugees



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and other civilians to the neighbouring areas of Yalda, Babila and Beit Saham (YBB).

Later in 2015, UNRWA managed to access the remaining 6,000 Palestine refugees in Yarmouk and YBB through cross-border missions to Yalda and continued until May 2016 when access was blocked. Almost all the remaining Palestine refugees left during the final government offensive for Yarmouk in April-May 2018, after which the government retook control of the camp left in ruins.

Due to the Agency's unprecedented financial crisis, critical health-care services like those extended to the returned Palestine refugees in Yarmouk are now in jeopardy, putting #PalestineRefugeesAtRisk.

In the meantime, UNRWA's media adviser Adnan Abu Hasana said the Agency is struggling with an acute financial deficit.

According to Abu Hasana, 90% of the Agency's funds are unstable. UNRWA is slated to hold a donor conference in April in order to push for steady donations by the different donor parties.

Abu Hasana attributed the crisis to the increase in the number of Palestine refugees and their increasing humanitarian demands, along with the funding cut by several donor states.

In another development, Palestinian refugee Walid Abdul Ghaffar, from Khan Dannun camp, in Rif Dimashq, has been secretly held in Syrian government prisons for the sixth consecutive year.



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Walid was arrested on October 16, 2015, on his way back to the camp from his workplace. His condition and whereabouts could not be identified.

AGPS has been deeply concerned about the upsurge in the number of Palestinian victims of torture and enforced disappearance in Syria.

Over 1,790 Palestinian refugees have been secretly held in Syrian government dungeons since the outburst of deadly hostilities.

AGPS also documented the death of over 600 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).