



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

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## التقرير اليومي

الخاص بأوضاع اللاجئين الفلسطينيين في سورية

Daily report on the situation of Palestinian refugees in Syria



**"Palestinian Refugee Community in Syria Concerned over Coronavirus Outbreak"**

- Coronavirus Cases Reported in Khan Eshieh Camp
- Popular Conference for Palestinians Abroad: Yarmouk's New Organizational Plan Jeopardizes Right of Return
- Residents of Khan Dannun Camp Denounce Frequent Power Blackouts

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## Latest developments

A state of panic has overwhelmed the Palestinian refugee community taking shelter in war-torn Syria following reports of increased coronavirus cases in and around Damascus.

State-run media outlets in Syria said Health Minister Nizar Yazaji ordered the closure of wedding halls to help curtail COVID-19 contaminations after a number of Syrian nationals have tested positive for the lethal virus.

Palestinian refugees have urged UNRWA to implement an efficient mechanism in order to prevent an unabated coronavirus outbreak in refugee camps and shelters.

AGPS continues to urge UNRWA and the Syrian Health Ministry to provide the Palestinian refugee community in the war-ravaged country with hygiene kit and relief items in light of the coronavirus outbreak.

AGPS also stresses the need to supply Palestinian refugee camps with medicines, detergents, and disinfectants in order to help the displaced communities defend themselves against the deadly COVID-19 virus.

AGPS is deeply concerned that the lack of transparency maintained by the Syrian government regarding the pandemic will result in a catastrophic situation in displacement camps, at a time when the deadly virus continues to claim the lives of thousands of people across the globe.



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AGPS fears the coronavirus could spread quickly in jails and in overcrowded displacement camps, where neither hygiene kit nor medical equipment are accessible.

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, activists in Khan Eshieh refugee camp have called for urgent action following reports of confirmed coronavirus cases among the camp residents.

A number of residents who contracted the virus have refused to reveal their names over bullying concerns.

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.

According to UN data, Khan Eshieh camp lies beside the ancient ruins of Khan Eshieh, 27km south-west of Damascus. The Khan historically served as an overnight shelter for trade caravans on the road between Damascus and the southwest, and in 1948, it provided shelter for the first refugees from Palestine. The camp was established in 1949 on an area of 0.69 square kilometers with refugees originally from the northern part of Palestine.



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Before the conflict in Syria, the camp was home to more than 20,000 Palestine refugees. In 2012, the farms and fields surrounding the camp became active battlegrounds in which heavy weapons were deployed, often indiscriminately. The population more than halved to 9,000.

Some of the camp's buildings and infrastructure were severely affected including some UNRWA installations; two UNRWA schools and the community centre were almost razed to the ground. In 2016, UNRWA was able to re-access Khan Esheih and the Agency was able to rehabilitate some of its installations. Residents have also slowly started to return, with the camp now accommodating 12,000 people.

Meanwhile, the Popular Conference for Palestinians Abroad (PalAbroad) has lashed out at the new plan set forth by Damascus Governorate to reconstruct Yarmouk Camp.

PalAbroad said the new plan is a threat to the Palestinian refugee community's right of return to their homeland and to the camp's historical specificity as a living witness to the refugee plight endured by over 200,000 Palestinians taking refuge in Yarmouk Camp.

In a statement issued on Monday, PalAbroad urged the Syrian authorities to reconsider the new plan, stressing the need that any proposed reconstruction chart should work on upholding the national and historical idiosyncrasy of Yarmouk Camp and of the individual and collective rights of its residents.



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PalAbroad also called for facilitating the return of Yarmouk's displaced population to their houses.

Palestinian refugees and human rights groups continue to voice their firm rejection of the new reconstruction plan for Yarmouk Camp, which has been subjected to massive destruction in the bloody conflict.

Tension has been running high in the area as thousands of refugees continue to rail against the proposed plan, amid growing fears that their homes and property will be removed from the new plan.

Sometime earlier, the Damascus Governorate said parts of Yarmouk Camp are state property, which implies that the residents are not entitled to own the land but only the property built on it.

Recently, AGPS has called on the Syrian authorities in Damascus to re-examine the new organizational plan and to rather implement the old plan which was approved in 2004.

In a statement, AGPS said plans that do not take into account Palestinians' inalienable rights make part of underway conspiracies to further displace the Palestinian people and destroy displacement camps as living witnesses to their refugee plight.

The statement said the new plan will remarkably change the demographic and architectural identity of the camp. Several buildings and facilities will be removed, which will lead to a mass displacement of refugee families and a further deterioration of their humanitarian condition.



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In case the plan is implemented, over half of the residents will not be able to return to their houses which they have abandoned in the bloody warfare.

UN data indicates that before the eruption of the conflict in 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 is one of three unofficial camps in Syria.

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 April 2015, 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 relief institutions unable to carry out any distributions inside Yarmouk but also displaced most of the remaining 18,000 Palestine refugees and other civilians to the neighboring areas of Yalda, Babila and Beit Saham (YBB).

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.

In the meantime, residents of Khan Dannun Camp, in Rif Dimashq, have denounced the ongoing electricity blackout across residential alleyways and buildings.



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The residents urged UNRWA and the concerned authorities to take the necessary measures in order to rehabilitate the power network and carry out the required maintenance works.

Living conditions in Khan Dannun have sharply deteriorated due to the lack of financial resources and high unemployment rates wrought by the unbridled warfare.

According to UN data, Khan Dannun camp was built several centuries ago to give overnight accommodation to trading caravans on the ancient route between Jerusalem and Constantinople (modern day Istanbul). In 1948, the ruins of the city provided shelter for refugees from villages in northern Palestine.

The camp, which lies 23 km south of Damascus, was officially established in 1950-1951 on an area of 0.03 square kilometers. The camp was home to 10,000 Palestine refugees by 2011, almost all of whom were living in irregular housing, constructed without any formal approval from the municipality.

Before the conflict in Syria, the camp was already one of the poorest camps in Syria. The conflict exerted additional pressures. The camp was surrounded by armed opposition groups and many refugee families displaced from other areas of Damascus took refuge in the camp, tripling the number of residents to some 30,000 during the crisis. Currently, the camp is home to 12,650 Palestine refugees. The increase of the camp population has had a negative impact on the camp's infrastructure.