



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 Facing Dire Humanitarian Condition in Syria's Qaboun Neighborhood"

- Palestinian Refugee Goes Missing in Syria Displacement Camp
- UN Body Pushes for Investigation into Migrant Pushbacks by Greek Police
- Palestinian Refugee Omar Hejazi Held in Syrian Gov't Jail for 8th Year

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Latest developments

More than nine years into the Syrian conflict, Palestinian refugees taking shelter in Qaboun neighborhood in Damascus continue to struggle with an ambivalent fate.

The area has been severely damaged by the bloody shootouts and heavy shelling. Scores of Palestinian refugees have been chased down, arrested, and/or subjected to extra-judicial executions over political grounds.

Nearly some 1,200 Palestinian refugee families have sought shelter in Qaboun since 1948, 70% among whom are natives of AlTantoura town, north of the occupied city of Haifa. Several families fled the area over security concerns and after the Syrian and Russian fighter jets started to shower the area with randomly-unleashed missiles and mortars.

AGPS data indicates that 30 Palestinians from Qaboun neighborhood died of war-related incidents in Syria. Ten other refugees have been held in Syrian government prisons.

The Syrian government forces recaptured the neighborhood in May 2017, following a reconciliation agreement with the opposition groups. The residents have been denied free access out of and into the area. Entry/exit are only allowed on Thursday and Friday. Civilians are subjected to intensive search at checkpoints pitched around the main entrances to the area. The Syrian security forces continue to crack down on civilians' free movement and



turned the area into a closed military zone under the pretext that it is landmine-laden and uninhabitable.

Despite the traumatic fallouts of the conflict, several Palestinian refugees sheltered in Qaboun have achieved success stories and outstanding academic and professional careers. A number of them are lecturers and professors at Syrian universities. Others are shopkeepers and real estate owners.

Palestinian families taking refuge in the area includes the Dasouki, AlMesri, AlHendi, Aweis, Bayer, Issa, AlShaweesh, Abdul Karim, Shkeir, and Khalaf families, among others.

The alarming situation of Qaboun residents is further jeopardized by the new reconstruction plan set forth by Damascus Governorate. Several families are likely to lose their houses and property.

Several residents of Qaboun neighborhood also fled to Europe, Turkey, and Egypt among other destinations. Others have become internally displaced in and around Damascus and northern Syria.

Located a few kilometers away from the northeastern corners of Damascus and four kilometers away from the city center, Qaboun neighborhood is bordered by Ghouta town to the east, Harasta to the west, Berzeh to the north, and Jober to the south. The international Damascus-Homs highway runs through Qaboun.

The area is made up of an industrial zone, comprising over 1,000 structures, and a residential zone, where the majority of buildings



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are unlicensed. Before 2011, Qaboun's population was estimated at some 100,000.

In another development, Palestinian refugee Husain Ali Kabalawi, aged 17, disappeared on Sunday from a displacement camp in war-torn Syria.

The family said the condition and whereabouts of Husain, a resident of Jaramana camp for Palestinian refugees, remain unknown, raising concerns that he might have been abducted by pro-government militias.

According to AGPS statistics, 332 Palestinian refugees have gone missing in the embattled Syrian territories since the outbreak of the bloody conflict. Most of those who have disappeared in the country are residents of Yarmouk Camp for Palestinian refugees, south of Damascus.

Activists have accused pro-government militias of targeting Palestinians in arbitrary abduction sweeps carried out under the security guise. Scores of families have been blackmailed over the release of their missing relatives and have paid large sums of money to brokers, crooked lawyers, or government officials to get pieces of information about their conditions.

Meanwhile, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has recently slammed the Greek authorities for forcibly pushing back asylum-seekers, including Palestinians and Syrians, to the Turkish waters.



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The UN body has urged Greece to launch a probe into such multiple reports of pushbacks and crackdowns by Greek police and coast guard.

In a recent report entitled “Greece: Investigate Pushbacks, Collective Expulsions”, Human Rights Watch (HRW) said that Greek law enforcement officers have summarily returned asylum seekers and migrants at the land and sea borders with Turkey during the Covid-19 lockdown.

The officers in some cases used violence against asylum seekers, including some who were deep inside Greek territory, and often confiscated and destroyed the migrants’ belongings.

In reviewing nine cases, HRW found no evidence that the authorities took any precautions to prevent the risk of transmission of Covid-19 to or among the migrants while in their custody. These findings add to growing evidence of abuses collected by nongovernmental groups and media, involving hundreds of people intercepted and pushed back from Greece to Turkey by Greek law enforcement officers or unidentified masked men over the last couple of months. Pushbacks violate several human rights norms, including against collective expulsion under the European Convention on Human Rights.

“Greek authorities did not allow a nationwide lockdown to get in the way of a new wave of collective expulsions, including from deep inside Greek territory,” said Eva Cossé, Greece researcher at Human Rights Watch. “Instead of protecting the most vulnerable people in this time of global crisis, Greek authorities have targeted



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them in total breach of the right to seek asylum and in disregard for their health.”

Human Rights Watch interviewed 13 victims and witnesses who described incidents in which the Greek police, the Greek Coast Guard, and unidentified men in black or commando-like uniforms, who appeared to be working in close coordination with uniformed authorities, violently pushed migrants back to Turkey in March and April 2020.

Six asylum seekers, from Syria, Palestine, and Iran, including a 15-year-old unaccompanied girl from Syria, described three incidents in March and April in which Greek Coast Guard personnel, Greek police, and armed masked men in dark clothing coordinated and carried out summary returns to Turkey from the Greek islands of Rhodes, Samos, and Symi. All of them said they were picked up on the islands soon after they landed, placed on larger Coast Guard boats, and once they were back at the sea border, were forced onto small inflatable rescue rafts, with no motor, and cast adrift near Turkish territorial waters.

HRW said Greek judicial authorities should conduct a transparent, thorough, and impartial investigation into allegations that Greek Coast Guard and Greek police personnel are involved in acts that put the lives and safety of migrants and asylum seekers at risk, Human Rights Watch said. Any officer engaged in illegal acts, as well as their commanding officers, should be subject to disciplinary sanctions and, if applicable, criminal prosecution.



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It added that the Greek parliament should urgently establish an inquiry into all allegations of collective expulsions, including pushbacks, and violence at the borders, and determine whether they amount to a de facto government policy.

Returns should follow a procedure that provides access to effective remedies and safeguards against refoulement – return to a country where they are likely to face persecution – and ill-treatment, Human Rights Watch said.

In the meantime, Palestinian refugee Omar Yakoob Hejazi, born in 1975, has been secretly locked up in Syrian government prisons for the eight year running.

Hejazi, a resident of Yarmouk Camp for Palestinian refugees, was kidnapped by Syrian government troops on the Lebanese-Syrian borders. No data has yet been revealed as to his fate and location.

According to AGPS data, 1,797 Palestinian refugees have been held captive in Syria's state-run lock-ups, among them 110 women and girls.