



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



"UNRWA Pledges Reimbursement of Day Laborers"

- Displaced Palestinian Families Call for Safe Return to Yarmouk Camp
- Palestinians in Lebanon Refugee Camps Denounce Absence of Humanitarian Assistance
- Anti-Coronavirus Initiatives Held in Khan Eshieh Refugee Camp

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Latest Developments

The new Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) said the Agency has decided to pay the salaries of its day workers.

The decision was announced by UNRWA's new head, Philippe Lazzarini on April 21. Day workers whose contracts have been valid for March and April and who have made office-based or home-based work will receive their salaries. Those who have not worked during March and April will receive 50% of their dues.



The decision comes weeks after the Agency had said it suspended the wages of day laborers (staff hired and paid one day at a time) after its operations got curtailed in its five fields of operations in response to COVID-19 outbreaks.

AGPS condemned the decision as arbitrary and unjust, saying it will affect thousands of Palestinian refugees who are the sole breadwinners for their cash-stripped families, particularly in poverty-stricken Gaza and war-tattered Syria. A suspension of their daily wages means that hundreds of children, women, and disabled



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persons risk to become deprived of vital items, including food and life-saving medicines.

AGPS said responses to coronavirus outbreaks should not be made at the expense of workers' sole livelihoods and to the detriment of their humanitarian needs.

UNRWA has over 30,000 employees, most of them Palestine refugees and a small number of international staff, in two headquarter offices (Gaza and Amman), five field offices (Gaza, Lebanon, Syria, Jordan and West Bank), and in four Representative/Liaison Offices (New York, Geneva, Brussels and Cairo).

In another development, Palestinian families continue to call on the concerned authorities to allow them a safe return to their homes in Yarmouk Camp, in Damascus, and to press ahead with reconstruction projects.

On January 07, 2020, Palestinian lawyer Nour AlDeen AlSaman, a resident of Yarmouk Camp, called on Palestinian refugees to file lawsuits in order to return to their homes and retrieve their properties in Yarmouk.

Such calls come in response to the reluctance maintained by local authorities in Damascus regarding the residents' ongoing appeals to rehabilitate infrastructure and allow displaced civilians to safely return to the camp.

A number of activists have also warned of ongoing attempts to alter the demographic character of the camp and blur its identity as a living witness to the Palestinian refugee plight.



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On February 4, 2019, a petition was handed over by the residents to Damascus governor Adel Anwar AlAlabi, urging local authorities to smooth the return of displaced families to their homes.

The 200-page petition, signed by 3,000 residents of Yarmouk Camp, called on the Syrian authorities to work on facilitating their immediate return to their homes and to rehabilitate destroyed infrastructure and facilities.

The residents expressed their readiness for voluntary work and to actively take part in reconstruction works.

Last year, the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR) published the results of an assessment of the damage to Syrian cities caused by seven years of relentless bombardment by the incumbent regime and its allies since 2011.

The analysis found out that as many as 5,489 buildings were destroyed in Yarmouk Camp for Palestinian refugees. The damage atlas used satellite-detected damage analysis to identify buildings that are either destroyed, or severely or moderately damaged.

Most of Palestinian families taking shelter south of Damascus fled Yarmouk as a result of the tough blockade imposed by the government troops and also after ISIS grabbed hold of the camp on April 1, 2015.

Scores of other stranded families fled the camp following the 33-day military operation launched by the government forces on April 19, 2018. The Syrian government regained control over the camp and southern Damascus towns following the military operation. Dozens



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of civilians were killed and dozens more injured. Over 80% of buildings have gone either totally or partially destroyed.

Meanwhile, some 240 Palestinian families taking refuge in Wavel camp, in Lebanon's AlBeqaa region, and Mieh wa Mieh camp, in the southern Lebanese city of Sidon, said their humanitarian situation has sharply deteriorated in light of the coronavirus pandemic.

A Palestinian refugee from Syria told AGPS that the families live below the poverty line, saying international humanitarian organizations continue to turn their back on their calls for urgent relief assistance.

The UN has identified Palestinian refugees in Lebanon as one of the most marginalized and poorest communities in the region as they continue to face high marginalization, making them heavily reliant on humanitarian support to cover their basic needs. The socio-economic hardships and unrest experienced by the country have compounded the refugees' already dire living conditions.

The majority of the Palestinian refugee population in Lebanon live in poverty and are unable to meet even their most essential food requirements. The refugees' vulnerability is further compounded by their lack of access to healthcare facilities.

Wavel refugee camp was originally a site of French Mandate-era army barracks situated 90 km east of Beirut in the Beqaa Valley near Baalbeck. It provided shelter to Palestine refugees in 1948. In 1952, UNRWA assumed responsibility for providing services in the camp. Many refugees still live in the original army barracks, which lack



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daylight and adequate ventilation. Conditions are particularly harsh in winter.

The ongoing Syria crisis has also led to the additional presence of Syrian refugees and Palestinian refugees from Syria (PRS) in the camp.

Camp residents are only able to find seasonal work in agriculture and sometimes construction. Students often drop out of school in order to support their families. The camp's water, sewerage and storm water drainage systems were rehabilitated between 2004 and 2005. However access to potable water remains a persistent challenge, as elsewhere in Lebanon.

Mieh Mieh refugee camp is located south of the city of Saida. The camp was established in 1954 and extends over an area of 54,000 sq m. The camp survived a series of major events in 1982, when the Israeli invasion destroyed many of the camp's shelters. These shelters were not rebuilt and alternative shelters were built instead along the southern border of the camp.

The ongoing Syria crisis has also led to an influx of Syrian refugees and PRS in the camp.

In the meantime, medics at UNRWA's clinic in Khan Eshieh camp paid field visits on April 20 to elderly people with chronic diseases and carried out routine at-home check-ups. Medics also handed them over the prescribed medicines and injunctions.

Recently, AGPS has urged UNRWA along with the Syrian Health Ministry to provide the Palestinian refugee community in the war-



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torn country with hygiene kit and relief items in light of the coronavirus outbreak.

AGPS also stressed 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 said it 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.

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.

