



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

26-11-2020

No. 2956

## التقرير اليومي

الخاص بأوضاع اللاجئين الفلسطينيين في سورية

Daily report on the situation of Palestinian refugees in Syria



**"From Syria to COVID-19 Frontline, Palestinian-Born Scientist Sets Sights on Vaccine"**

- Palestinian Refugee Killed in Northern Aleppo Blast
- Residents of AlRaml Camp for Palestinian Refugees Denounce Mistreatment at UNRWA Clinic
- Palestinian Refugee Murad Hamad Forcibly Disappeared in Syrian Prisons since 2013
- UNRWA Begins Food Aid Distribution in Hama Camp

+442084530978

/Actgroup.palsyria

reports@actionpal.org.uk

www.actionpal.org.uk



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

## **Victims**

Palestinian refugee Samer Khalil ALToukhi, born in 1987, died of wounds he sustained in a blast that rocked AlBab city, east of Aleppo, on November 24, 2020.

Five people died in the explosion and over 20 others were left wounded.

AGPS has documented the death of 4,048 Palestinian refugees as a result of war-related incidents in Syria.

## **Latest Developments**

A refugee with Palestinian origins has made cutting-edge work on a COVID-19 vaccine, challenging the traumatic impact of his statelessness and the psychological scars of the Syria war.

Scientist Nowras Rahhal, who moved to Germany two years ago from Syria's war-shattered capital Damascus, is stateless - meaning no country recognises him as a citizen.

"When you are stateless, the simple question 'Where are you from?' becomes very loaded," he told the Thomson Reuters Foundation.

"Most people are happy to say where they belong, but I don't know what to answer. I'd love to have a place to call home."

Rahhal, 27, has just finished working with a team at one of the Max Planck institutes on developing a system allowing a COVID-19 vaccine to be applied to the skin, rather than injected into muscle.



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

He said the technique - targeting specialist immune cells in the skin that can trigger an immune reaction in the body - would require a far smaller dose per person, a big advantage when inoculating large populations.

Before arriving in Germany, Rahhal spent years studying to the sound of bombings and artillery fire, using his phone torch to read when the electricity cut out at his Damascus home.

But Rahhal's academic achievements are remarkable for another reason - stateless people often struggle to access education.

According to Thomson Reuters Foundation, Rahhal's grandfather was among tens of thousands of Palestinians who were forced out of the Palestinian city of Haifa during Israeli invasion in 1948.

Today there are half a million Palestinians in Syria, but they are not allowed to naturalise even though most were born in the country.

Although Rahhal's mother is Syrian, laws in many Arab countries ban women passing their nationality to their children, so Rahhal, his two brothers and sister were born stateless like their father.

There are an estimated 10 million stateless people in the world with large populations in Myanmar, Ivory Coast, Thailand and Dominican Republic. Deprived of basic rights, they often live on the margins of society.

While stateless Palestinians do not enjoy the same rights as Syrian nationals, they can access education, healthcare and jobs.



Rahhal, who spent most of his childhood in the now bombed out Damascus suburb of Darayya, went to a school run by UNRWA, the U.N. agency responsible for Palestinian refugees.

The scientist said he was lucky to be born into a family that valued education. His Syrian-born father is an agricultural engineer, his mother an economist.

But as he grew up, Rahhal saw how statelessness stalled his father's career and prevented him pursuing opportunities abroad.

There was social prejudice too. After meeting a girl at university, Rahhal was crushed when her family ended the relationship.

"They told me I wasn't welcome because I was a stateless refugee. This incident had a big impact on me. It was pure discrimination," he said.

Leaving his family in 2018 was heartbreaking.

"It was like I was saying goodbye almost for the last time because I don't know when I'll see them again," he said.

"When I saw my family crying I was determined to do something that made them proud."

Rahhal said the war has left him with physical and psychological scars, but prefers not to talk about his experiences.

He did not flee Syria as a refugee, but applied to study in Germany after gaining a degree in pharmaceutical sciences from Damascus University.



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

Rahhal's diligence has seen him nominated for best international student at the University of Kassel, where he received a masters in nanosciences this month, achieving the highest grade.

He has also learned German, worked on cancer drug research and helped with a bilingual storytelling project for refugee children.

But Rahhal's statelessness continues to cast a large shadow over his life. Even simple tasks like validating a phone SIM card become a huge headache without a nationality, he said.

Flummoxed German authorities have changed his status three times - first categorising him as stateless, then Syrian, and now as unspecified.

"When you look at your ID and you see you are an 'undefined person' it's really painful," he said.

His documents create suspicion among officials and baffle acquaintances.

"If I say I'm stateless I worry if people will think I've done something so bad in life that I've had my nationality taken away," he added.

Christoph Rademacher, a professor in molecular drug targeting, who picked Rahhal to join the COVID-19 vaccine project, said he was astonished when he learned about the hurdles his protege has had to overcome.



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

Rahhal is now embarking on a Phd in vaccine technology under Rademacher at the University of Vienna.

Their vaccine has passed initial tests and is undergoing further trials with another team.

Rahhal hopes his story will encourage other young stateless people to dream big, and spur more countries to back a U.N. campaign to end statelessness called #Ibelong.

U.N. experts say the global failure to integrate stateless people is an enormous waste of human potential.

"I'm very lucky because I had the chance to get an education," Rahhal said. "I'm sure if other stateless kids had these opportunities we'd hear a lot more success stories."

In another development, residents of AlRaml Camp, in Latakia, have spoken out against the mistreatment they have been subjected to by staff members at a UNRWA-run clinic in AlQuds neighborhood, in the camp.

An elderly woman who showed up at the facility for treatment after she suffered hypertension was reportedly mistreated by two female staffers and prevented from entering the clinic, according to the patient's brother.

Local activists have urged the UN refugee agency, the General Authority for Palestinian Arab Refugees, and all other concerned authorities to take immediate action in response to the mistreatment they have been facing at the UNRWA premises.



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

In a statement emailed to AGPS, the residents slammed the medical staff at the clinic for their apathy regarding the appeals of a number of patients for much-needed treatment and medicines, along with psychological support.

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

Latakia camp is an "unofficial" camp located within the city boundaries of Latakia on the Mediterranean coast. The camp was established in 1955-1956 on an area of 0.22 square kilometers. Most of the refugees originally came from the city of Jaffa and villages in northern Palestine.

UN data indicates that before the start of conflict in 2011, the camp was home to 10,000 Palestine refugees. It is estimated that 2,000 Palestine refugees have left the country. The camp has been largely unaffected by the hostilities, meaning that it has become a safe haven for Palestine refugees from Aleppo, Yarmouk and other places. Currently there are 14,000 Palestine refugees living in and around Latakia.

Residents of the camp are mostly civil servants or employed in shops. Fishing also provides a small income for many refugees.

Like other areas in Syria, displacement, unemployment, inflation, protection and security risks are among the main concerns shared by Palestine refugees and Syrians alike. Increasing poverty and hardship as a direct consequence of the ongoing crisis in Syria has



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

led to an increase of negative coping mechanisms like early marriage, child labour and drug consumption. UNRWA has increased its efforts to carry out preventative and awareness-raising activities through its schools and community centres.

Meanwhile, Palestinian refugee Murad Issa Ahmad Hamad, born in 1985, has been secretly held in Syrian government prisons for the seventh consecutive year.

Murad, from Deraa Camp for Palestinian refugees, was arrested by Syrian security forces in mid-2013.

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).





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

In the meantime, UNRWA started on November 26 distributing food aid items to the most vulnerable Palestinian families in AlAyedeen refugee camp, in Hama.

Hama camp lies within the town of Hama, 210 km north of Damascus. The camp was established in 1950 on an area of 0.06 square kilometres overlooking the Orontes river. Most of the refugees had fled from the villages surrounding Haifa and Acre in northern Palestine.

UN data indicates that before the conflict in Syria, there were 8,000 Palestine refugees living in Hama camp. It is estimated that 1,000 of the original population have left the country. Hama camp has not been affected by the conflict and attracted displaced Palestine refugees from elsewhere in Syria, boosting the population. The camp is currently home to between 300 and 400 displaced Palestine refugee families, and the camp population is estimated to be around 9,000 Palestine refugees. Most employed refugees are wage labourers or shopkeepers, but many rely on UNRWA assistance to survive.

In 2018, UNRWA rehabilitated one of its two schools, both built in the 1950s, due to aging.

Environmental health in the camp is a serious problem and the mechanization of solid waste disposal is one of the most pressing needs. The sewerage system is antiquated and does not meet the requirements of a growing camp population.



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

Like other areas in Syria, displacement, unemployment, inflation, protection and security risks are among the main concerns shared by Palestine refugees and Syrians alike. Increasing poverty and hardship as a direct consequence of the ongoing crisis in Syria has led to an increase of negative coping mechanisms like early marriage, child labour and drug consumption.