



مجموعة العمل من أجل فلسطينيين 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 Refugee Arrested in Austria"

- Palestinian Girl Killed by Bullet Fire in Syria Displacement Camp
- Over 110 Palestinian Women Secretly Held in Syrian Jails
- Palestinian Refugee Ahmad Khamis Held in Syrian Gov't Jails
- Rights Group: Greece's New Asylum System Designed to Deport, Not Protect

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Latest developments

The Austrian authorities arrested a Palestinian refugee from Syria over allegations of involvement in abuses committed in favor of the Syrian regime.

The arrestee was a resident of AlNeirab Camp for Palestinian refugees, in Aleppo. AGPS has kept his name secret over security concerns.

In another development, 16-year-old Palestinian refugee Fatma Kasem was pronounced dead after she was accidentally shot with a bullet in her stomach in AlNeirab Camp for Palestinian refugees, in Aleppo.

The unrestrained flow of arms among the pro-government militias in AlNeirab Camp has marred civilians' lives.

In a letter emailed earlier to AGPS, residents attributed the simmering tension to the free access to weapons by Liwaa AlQuds militias, affiliated with the Syrian government.

The residents continue to call on the concerned authorities to urgently work on disarming the camp and protecting vulnerable civilians.

AlNeirab camp is the largest official camp in Syria and is 13km east of the city of Aleppo near the Aleppo airport.

Before the start of the conflict in Syria, Neirab camp was home to more than 20,000 Palestine refugees. Like other Palestine refugee camps in Syria, a large number of families, young people, have travelled abroad. The camp has also seen a large influx of more



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than 900 families from the nearby Ein el Tal camp, which has been mostly destroyed.

With nearly 18,000 registered refugees, Neirab camp is among the most densely populated camps. The camp suffers from overcrowding and a lack of privacy. Like other areas in Syria, displacement, unemployment, inflation, protection and security risks are among the main concerns shared by Palestine refugees and Syrians alike.

The location of the camp near the military airport means the area was exposed to hazards including mortars and shelling between the start of 2013 and the end of 2018.

Meanwhile, at least 110 Palestinian women and girls have been enduring mysterious fates in Syrian government dungeons, where scores of others died as a result of torture. Palestinian women have also been subjected to abrupt searches and exhaustive questioning at military checkpoints.

AGPS has frequently sounded the alarm over the violations perpetrated against Palestinian women in war-torn Syria, most notable among these are arrests, abductions, executions, body disfigurement, sniper attacks, sexual abuse, enforced deportation, and denial of the right to a fair trial, among other violations that flagrantly breach international laws and treaties.

AGPS documented the death of over 35 Palestinian women and girls under torture in Syrian government dungeons.



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The total death toll among the Palestinians of Syria who have fallen prey to fatal torture in Syrian state prisons has hit 600, among them children and elderly refugees.

AGPS believes the number to be far higher as scores of casualties have gone undocumented after the Syrian authorities kept their names secret. Several families have also refused to reveal their relatives' names over retaliation concerns.

According to affidavits by ex-detainees, Palestinian women and girls have been subjected to harsh psycho-physical torture tactics in Syrian penitentiaries, including electric shocks, heavy beating using iron sticks, and sexual abuse.

Such practices represent flagrant violations of the Declaration on the Protection of Women and Children in Emergency and Armed Conflict of 1974, Article 5, which criminalizes all forms of torture and mistreatment against women and children.

Inherently a taboo misdemeanor in the MENA region, violence against women, be it sexual, physical, or verbal, has remained under-reported among the Palestinian refugee community in Syria, with reasons wavering between fear of retaliation, embarrassment, social prestige, fear of punishment for those below the age of criminal responsibility, and distrust in law enforcement.

Along similar lines, Palestinian ex-prisoner Ahmad Khamis, who was released from Israeli jails as part of an Israel-Russian swap deal and re-arrested by Syrian security forces, has been enduring an unknown fate in Syrian prisons.



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Informed sources told AGPS that Khamis was arrested in June 2019 and has been subjected to exhaustive interrogation by Syrian intelligence officers at Palestine Branch 235.

Khamis, a resident of Yarmouk Camp, in Damascus, was released from Israeli jails in early 2019 and was taken back to Syria, in what media sources described as Russian-mediated reciprocation for the repatriation of the body of the long-missing Israeli soldier Zachary Baumel.

Khamis was kidnapped in April 2005, allegedly after he attempted to creep into an Israeli military base and carry out an anti-occupation operation in the occupied Golan Heights. He was sentenced to 18 years in jail and spent 14 years of the term.

An Israeli official speaking on condition of anonymity said at the time that Israel agreed to release the prisoner as a "goodwill gesture" after the return of the remains of Zachary Baumel earlier this month.

Israel's military announced on 3 April that Baumel's remains, missing since the 1982 Lebanon war, had been returned, bringing to a close a highly sensitive case for Israelis.

The announcement came less than a week before hotly contested Israeli elections, which saw Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu win a fifth term in office.

Russian President Vladimir Putin said during a visit by Netanyahu that the remains had been found by the Russian and Syrian armies, in a context where Moscow has a military presence in Syria to support President Bashar AlAssad.



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But Syrian Information Minister Imad Sara said on 4 April that Damascus had no knowledge of plans to repatriate the remains, nor was it aware of the details behind the discovery of the body and its subsequent transfer.

In the meantime, the Greek Council for Refugees (GCR) and Oxfam have warned that the new Greek asylum system is designed to deport people rather than offer them safety and protection.

According to GCR and Oxfam, this means that people who have fled violence and persecution have little chance of a fair asylum procedure, and even families with children are regularly detained in inhumane conditions.

In the report 'Diminished, Derogated, Denied', published on July 1, the organisations showed how the reformed Greek asylum law, which entered into force on 1 January 2020 and was later amended in May, exposed people to abuse and exploitation.

The situation is further aggravated by the inhumane living conditions in Greece's refugee camps where people are now at risk of a devastating health crisis should COVID-19 reach the camps.

Evelien van Roemburg, Oxfam's Europe migration campaign manager, said: "Greece's new law is a blatant attack on Europe's humanitarian commitment to protect people fleeing conflict and persecution. The European Union is complicit in this abuse, because for years it has been using Greece as a test ground for new migration policies. We are extremely worried that the EU will now use Greece's asylum system as a blueprint for Europe's upcoming asylum reform."



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The organisations' analysis found that many particularly vulnerable people – such as children, pregnant women and people with disabilities – have been detained upon arrival on the 'hotspot' islands, without sufficient access to necessary care or protection. The asylum system also makes it extremely difficult for people seeking asylum to properly present their reasons for fleeing their home countries, like conflict or persecution, to the Greek asylum service.

“While Greece has a sovereign right to manage its borders, it must protect the fundamental principle of non-refoulement. The EU and Greece have made the political choice to jeopardise the lives and futures of people it has a responsibility to protect,” added van Roenburg.

In the EU 'hotspot' centre of Moria on the Greek island of Lesbos, people are crammed in a camp, which is currently at six times its capacity. They do not have sufficient access to basic healthcare, clean toilets, or handwashing facilities, and the overcrowding makes social distancing – which is critical to prevent the coronavirus from spreading – impossible.

Testimonies gathered by the Greek Council for Refugees expose these harrowing living conditions in Moria.

“The situation in Moria was scary. During the pandemic, everybody was afraid that if the virus gets to us, then they will dig a mass grave to bury us. They only gave us two masks and soap. But how are we supposed to wash our hands without water? In the food line, it was so packed, we couldn't keep a distance. We were not protected,” said a refugee.



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The organisations said that reformed law effectively bars many people who do not have legal support from appealing an asylum rejection. Deadlines have been shortened drastically and, in many cases, expire before people are informed of the decision. People seeking asylum are only able to submit an actual appeal through a lawyer – but in Lesbos, there is only one state-sponsored lawyer.

Spyros-Vlad Oikonomou, advocacy officer at GCR said: “The Greek government must restore a fair asylum system, which fully respects human rights. The European Commission must review Greece’s asylum practices and assess their compliance with EU law.”

For many already traumatised people, the living conditions in places like Moria exposes them to further harm. Over the past months, during the COVID-19 lockdown, there has been a worrying increase in cases of sexual harassments and reports of rape, and of domestic violence in the camp.

Palestinian refugees from Syria continue to risk their lives onboard the “death boats” to Greece. Activists estimate that around 4,000 Palestinian refugees from Syria are taking shelter on Greek islands.