

Several Palestine refugees killed by armed hostilities in Yarmouk

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East Jerusalem

UNRWA remains gravely concerned about the risks posed to Palestine refugee civilians in several camps in Damascus Governorate, particularly in Yarmouk, where ongoing armed conflict is reaching new peaks of intensity.

To the south of Damascus city, several Palestine refugee camps and areas of residence have experienced sporadic armed hostilities for weeks, with Seyda Zeinab, Husseinieh and Sbeineh among the most affected. Yarmouk is, however, at the centre of UNRWA's concern, as credible reports point to a sharp escalation in the armed confrontation there. In one incident, in the evening of 24 July, ten civilians, including at least five Palestine refugees, were reportedly killed, allegedly as a result of two rockets impacting in a residential area.

Some 130,000 Palestine refugees have fled Yarmouk since December 2012. UNRWA is now providing humanitarian assistance to around 25,000 Palestine refugee civilians who choose to remain in or lack the means to leave Yarmouk. These are men, women and children who have no part in the hostilities and are therefore entitled, under international humanitarian law, to protection from armed conflict and its effects. While UNRWA is not in a position to independently verify reports of Palestinian deaths in Yarmouk, it is clear that further armed escalation is causing new waves of displacement and a rise in the toll of Palestinian deaths, injuries, trauma and overall suffering.

UNRWA strongly appeals to all sides to avoid the serious humanitarian consequences caused by disregarding of international legal obligations. Palestine refugees and other civilians must be protected, and civilian homes, properties and other civilian infrastructure spared from damage and destruction. All parties must avoid conducting the conflict in Palestine refugee camps and other civilian areas.

UNRWA deplores the human suffering engendered by the insistence on attempting to resolve the Syria conflict militarily. In the strongest terms, UNRWA reiterates its appeal to all concerned parties to end the suffering, comply with their obligations under international law and resolve the conflict in Syria through mediated dialogue and negotiations.

– Ends –

Background information

UNRWA is a United Nations agency established by the General Assembly in 1949 and is mandated to provide assistance and protection to a population of some 5 million registered Palestine refugees. Its mission is to help Palestine refugees in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, West Bank and the Gaza Strip to achieve their full potential in human development, pending a just solution to their plight. UNRWA's services encompass education, health care, relief and social services, camp infrastructure and improvement, and microfinance.

Financial support to UNRWA has not kept pace with an increased demand for services caused by growing numbers of registered refugees, expanding need, and deepening poverty. As a result, the Agency's General Fund (GF), supporting UNRWA's core activities and 97 per cent reliant on voluntary contributions, has begun each year with a large projected deficit. Currently the deficit stands at US\$ 58.5 million.

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Background Information:

UNRWA is confronted with an increased demand for services resulting from a growth in the number of registered Palestine refugees, the extent of their vulnerability and their deepening poverty. UNRWA is funded almost entirely by voluntary contributions and financial support has been outpaced by the growth in needs. As a result, the UNRWA programme budget, which supports the delivery of core essential services, operates with a large shortfall. UNRWA encourages all Member States to work collectively to exert all possible efforts to fully fund the Agency's programme budget. UNRWA emergency programmes and key projects, also operating with large shortfalls, are funded through separate funding portals. UNRWA is a United Nations agency established by the General Assembly in 1949 and mandated to provide assistance and protection to some 5.4 million Palestine refugees registered with UNRWA across its five fields of operation. Its mission is to help Palestine refugees in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, West Bank, including East Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip achieve their full human development potential, pending a just and lasting solution to their plight. UNRWA services encompass education, health care, relief and social services, camp infrastructure and improvement, protection and microfinance.