

UNRWA expresses concern over situation in Yarmouk

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UNRWA food distribution in Yalda, 14 March 2016. © 2016 UNRWA Photo

Statement by UNRWA Spokesperson Chris Gunniss

UNRWA is extremely concerned by the humanitarian consequences of intense armed conflict between extremist armed groups inside Yarmouk since 6 April. It is distressing to see yet another episode of extreme trauma and suffering imposed on civilians in Yarmouk. The continuous, highly intense fighting is not only causing civilian casualties and fatalities, but has also acutely aggravated shortages of food and clean water for the approximately 6,000 civilian families residing inside Yarmouk. Given the situation of extreme insecurity, UNRWA strongly deplores this latest interruption of this vital humanitarian support to desperate civilians in Yarmouk. The Agency calls on the concerned parties to cease hostilities and to comply with their obligations under international humanitarian law to respect and to protect the lives of civilians in Yarmouk. UNRWA is anxiously monitoring the situation with a view to resuming – as soon as it is safe to do so – its humanitarian missions to support civilians in the Yarmouk-Yalda area.

For eight consecutive weeks from 13 February to 7 April, UNRWA, with the facilitation of the Syrian government, undertook 21 cross-line missions into Yalda, serving 6,000 Palestine refugee families from Yarmouk, Yalda, Babila and Beit Saham. During this period, UNRWA staff distributed a total of 11,700 food parcels, 11,600 hygiene kits and 19,160 blankets to families in need of assistance. UNRWA staff also provided primary health care to 1,448 patients and dental care to 119 patients. To help reverse the years of deprivation endured by civilians in Yarmouk, this minimal level of humanitarian assistance must be sustained.

Based on the number of individuals receiving assistance during Yalda missions, UNRWA estimates that there are 6,000 civilian families residing in Yarmouk-Yalda area. With the eruption of intense armed conflict inside Yarmouk since 6 April, the Yalda area is extremely tense. UNRWA is extremely concerned about – and civilians are fearful of – the potential humanitarian implications if the zone of armed conflict were to widen. The outbreak of fighting has already caused UNRWA to suspend humanitarian missions to Yalda this week. As long as the fighting continues, these missions will remain suspended.

Background on the situation in Yarmouk camp

Prior to 13 February 2016, the last UNRWA mission to the area adjacent to Yarmouk took place on 23 September 2015. This gave credence to reports over the past seven months about severe food shortages inside Yarmouk amid increasing harsh conditions. Since 13 February, UNRWA, with the facilitation of the Syrian Government, has conducted 21 humanitarian missions to Yalda, a location immediately adjacent to Yarmouk to the south-east. For eight consecutive weeks UNRWA has delivered food parcels and essential items like blankets and hygiene kits and offered medical and dental care to civilians in the Yarmouk-Yalda area. As hundreds of civilians residing in Yarmouk were able to walk to Yalda to receive assistance and to return to their homes, UNRWA's missions significantly alleviated the shortages of food and were widely welcomed as making a difference to the well-being of civilians in Yarmouk and the surrounding areas.

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.

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