

UNRWA deeply concerned about the escalation of fighting and fate of thousands of Palestine refugees in Yarmouk camp and surrounding areas

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Statement by Sami Mshasha/Chris Guinness

UNRWA is again warning of the catastrophic consequences of the severe escalation of fighting affecting the Palestine refugee camp of Yarmouk in Damascus and surrounding areas.

“Yarmouk and its inhabitants have endured indescribable pain and suffering over years of conflict. We are deeply concerned about the fate of thousands of civilians, including Palestine refugees, after more than a week of dramatically increased violence”, said UNRWA Commissioner-General, Pierre Krähenbühl.

The current hostilities have caused deaths and injuries and have displaced around five thousand Palestine refugees from Yarmouk into the neighboring area of Yalda. There are also an unconfirmed number of civilians stranded in Yarmouk, who are in dire need of safe passage from the camp. Those families who managed to take refuge in Yalda have been forced to sleep in the streets or in makeshift shelters.

The intense bombing and shelling has reportedly damaged thousands of homes. There is no more running water and very little electricity. Yarmouk’s last hospital is now no longer functional. There are no doctors remaining and healthcare options for those still in Yarmouk are severely limited if at all existent. The checkpoint into the area is closed to civilians and goods.

UNRWA repeats its urgent appeal to all parties involved in the fighting to exercise maximum restraint to ensure that civilians are spared from the violence, and that measures are taken to prevent unnecessary damage to civilian infrastructure. We call for the immediate granting of safe passage for civilians wishing to leave the camp and surrounding areas and for the evacuation of the injured, the sick and the elderly. International humanitarian law must be respected at all times.

“UNRWA stands ready to provide urgently needed assistance to the population in and around Yarmouk, as soon as the security situation permits and access is granted, Mr. Krähenbühl underlined.

Ends

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.