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The UN Refugee Agency

UNHCR UPDATE ON SYRIA: INCLUDING AL-HOL RESPONSE (NORTH-EAST SYRIA)

26-28 February 2019

POLITICAL UPDATE

- **Briefing to the UN Security Council on Syria:** OCHA's Director for Operations and Advocacy Reena Ghelani [briefed](#) the Security Council on 26 February on behalf of ERC Lowcock. She noted that in 2019, an estimated 11.7 million people will require life-saving humanitarian assistance across Syria. She highlighted the gravity of the situation in Rukban (the 'Berm') and the importance of sustained humanitarian access. She also noted that the UN remains "extremely concerned" for civilians affected by hostilities in Deir-ez-Zor governorate, north-east Syria, and flagged the recent increase in fighting in Idlib governorate, north-west Syria.
- **Russia and Syria issue joint statement on Rukban; call on US forces to leave Syria:** On 27 February, Russia and Syria issued a [joint statement](#) calling on US forces to leave Syria and to allow the population in Rukban to be evacuated by Russian and Syrian forces. The statement, released by the Russian Ministry of Defence, said Russian and Syrian forces had prepared buses to relocate individuals from Rukban and would guarantee them safe passage. The statement accused US-backed forces of "forcibly detaining" and preventing individuals from leaving Rukban, adding that on 1 March, the Syrian government would form additional "humanitarian convoys" for the "voluntary and unhindered return" of individuals in Rukban.
- **Iraq PM says country could take non-Iraqi ISIL detainees from Syria:** At a news conference on 26 February, the Iraq Prime Minister Adel Abdul Mahdi [was quoted](#) as saying that Iraq could help transfer non-Iraqi ISIL detainees held by the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) in Syria. Iraq would either help repatriate those citizens to their home countries, or prosecute on its own those suspected of having committed crimes, he said.

DEVELOPMENTS IN NORTH-EAST SYRIA

- **Over 44,000 people have fled fighting in north-east Syria:** Since military actions by the International Coalition Forces (ICF) escalated in early December, around 44,000 people have fled from Hajin and Baghouz (Deir-ez-Zor governorate) to Al-Hol camp (Al-Hassakeh governorate) in north-east Syria, the majority of whom are women and children. Thousands of additional people are expected to arrive at Al-Hol camp in the coming days and weeks.
- **In the last five days, some 12,500 people, mainly women and children, have arrived at Al-Hol camp from Baghouz:** The overwhelming majority of the newly arrived population consists of women and children (some 95%). Amongst this population, it is estimated that 64 per cent are children.
- **At least 78 people, the majority being children under the age of one, have died while on their journey, or shortly after their arrival in Al-Hol camp since December 2018.** Extremely harsh conditions are reported along the route, including cold temperatures and a lack of food, water, shelter and health services. Humanitarian actors fear an increase in mortality rates due to the poor health condition of the new arrivals, the cold weather, and dire conditions in transit and/or upon arrival.
- **Al-Hol camp now accommodating over 53,000 individuals:** The conditions are extremely dire as the camp has surpassed by far its accommodation capacity. The composition of the new arrivals are mixed and include Syrian, Iraqi as well as other foreign nationals. Al-Hol camp is under the control and administration of the Kurdish Self Administration while camp management is assumed by an international non-governmental organization (INGO). Assistance is provided by all humanitarian actors present in north-east Syria.

UNHCR RESPONSE TO NEW DISPLACEMENT



- **Response efforts scaled up in Al-Hol camp:** Humanitarian partners have significantly scaled up assistance and service provision inside the camp, including site extension (into Phases 6 & 7) and expanded services at reception points. UNHCR and partners have set up 24 hour response teams to receive the new arrivals, quickly identify the most vulnerable cases and provide urgent assistance, especially to unaccompanied or separated children, persons with disabilities and those who require immediate medical assistance. However, existing resources and capacity have been severely over-stretched. Since 25 February, arrivals have been sheltered in the reception facilities until security screening procedures are completed, received emergency assistance and are moved to new zones of the camp, which are still underserved and lack basic services. On 26 February, some 500 people slept in the open, and an additional 500 individuals used only plastic sheeting to protect themselves from the cold.
- **Protection teams are present 24/7 in the camp:** They are mainly involved in early identification of persons with specific needs and fast-tracking of urgent cases (pregnant women, women with infants, persons with critical medical conditions) through screening procedure, emergency assistance and access to specialized services. Child protection teams have identified young children who have been exposed to extreme violence and there is an urgent need for specialized response for these children. Assembly point for unaccompanied and lost children have been established at screening area and managed by protection teams. An information desk has been set up to assist new arrivals to navigate through the assistance processes.
- **Response at the transit site near Suar town (Deir-ez-Zor governorate):** A further 3,000 people are at the Suar transit site awaiting transfer to Al-Hol. This site, midway between Hajin and Al-Hol, was established by UN and partners to provide assistance, including medical assistance for urgent cases, to the IDPs during the journey. IDPs have been provided with core relief items, winterization package, hygiene kits, sanitary napkins and baby diapers.



The humanitarian situation in Al-Hol camp (north-east Syria) is extremely dire, as large numbers of newly displaced people continue to arrive in the camp. © UNHCR

Displacement route from Hajin and Baghouz (Deir-ez-Zor governorate) to Al-Hol camp (Al-Hassakeh governorate) in north-east Syria:

