

# UNRWA calls on all parties to refrain from hostilities in civilian areas as death toll rises in Khan Eshieh camp

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The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA) calls on all parties to the conflict in Syria to comply with international law and stop conducting hostilities in civilian residential areas, including Palestine refugee camps. UNRWA further urges parties to refrain from using explosive weapons in populated areas, whose indiscriminate effects expose civilians to imminent danger and suffering.

Three Palestine refugees lost their lives in Khan Eshieh camp on 2 and 3 October, while another 11 were injured, as a result of the intensification of hostilities in the area.

The three who died were twenty year old Abdallah Issa, thirty year old Mahmoud Abu Sitteh, and thirty year old Mohammed Ali who lost his life while attempting to rescue injured people. UNRWA and its staff wish to express their sincere condolences to the bereaved families.

This incident comes as a dramatic illustration of the extreme circumstances affecting civilians in Khan Eshieh. Hostilities in an around the camp have resulted in the death of at least 23 Palestine refugees - with many more injured - over the past three months. The situation took a further turn for the worse on 28 September, when the UNRWA Salameh Girls Preparatory School suffered a direct hit and a student and two teachers were injured.

UNRWA is deeply concerned about the well-being of all residents in Khan Eshieh, including Palestine refugees. Too many lives have been lost while those injured are often not able to receive required emergency medical and other health services.

Since 2013, humanitarian access to Khan Eshieh has been constrained. UNRWA has not been able to deliver regular and direct assistance to the camp, including primary health care services. To receive humanitarian assistance, Palestine refugees from the camp must often travel at great personal risk to alternative UNRWA distribution centers over fifteen kilometers away in Sahnaya or Khan Dunnoun.

The incidents in Khan Eshieh have taken place in a wider Syrian context marked by the alarming - and in human terms catastrophic - deterioration of the conflict, notably in areas such as Aleppo and Rural Damascus.

International law imposes strict requirements on all parties for the protection of civilians during conflict. Conduct contrary to these obligations causes large numbers of avoidable civilian deaths, injuries and displacement, including among the Palestine refugee community in Syria, and must cease. It is imperative that all sides strictly comply with their obligations under international law.

## UNRWA in Syria

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UNRWA in Syria provides vital humanitarian support and health and education services to 450,000 Palestine refugees. Over 95 percent of the Palestine refugees in Syria are wholly reliant on UNRWA humanitarian aid.

Khan Eshieh camp, home to about 9,000 Palestine refugees, is located in a volatile area in the rural area south of Damascus, where spikes in violence have caused the deaths of 20 Palestine refugees since 17 May 2016. Since 2012, the farms and fields surrounding the camp have been active battlegrounds in which heavy weapons have been deployed with often indiscriminate impact. Some 25 UNRWA staff residing in the camp strive to maintain support to Palestine refugees through limited services offered in three schools, a health clinic and a community centre. The Agency's work is impeded by the fact that since 2013, humanitarian access to Khan Eshieh has been constrained. To receive assistance, Palestine refugees must travel at great personal risk to UNRWA distribution centres in Sahnaya or Khan Dunoun.

### 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.