

UNRWA Condemns the killing of thirteenth staff member in Syria

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The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA) strongly condemns the parties responsible for the killing of its thirteenth staff member in Syria on Thursday, 21 August. Mohammad Mizel, a teacher at Tiberias School, Dera'a, died when a vehicle he was travelling in was struck by gunfire as he departed Dera'a Camp. Mr. Mizel's son was also seriously injured in the incident. The thoughts and condolences of all UNRWA staff are with his bereaved family.

Mr. Mizel and his son were attempting to relocate their household to a safer area of Dera'a when the incident occurred on Thursday evening. Several shots struck the pick-up truck they were driving, which was being used to transport family possessions towards the al-Qashef area of Dera'a. Mr. Mizel died at the scene, while his son suffered chest wounds for which he underwent hospital treatment in Dera'a.

Mr. Mizel served UNRWA with distinction for over 33 years. He is survived by his wife, four sons and three daughters.

In common with thousands of Palestine refugees in Syria, the story of Mr. Mizel's family is one of recurrent trauma and tragedy. He lost one son in conflict-related violence in 2013 and another son has been missing for over a year. At the time of his death, Mr. Mizel was seeking to escape worsening violence in Dera'a Camp, which has endured over two years of armed clashes including the use of heavy weapons.

The incident comes only six weeks after explosive munitions caused the deaths of 13 civilians, including nine Palestine refugees, in Dera'a Camp. Mr. Mizel's tragic death illustrates the devastating impact the conflict continues to inflict on Palestine refugees and other civilians in Syria.

UNRWA deplores this attack on a UN staff member and the serious physical and psychological harm such incidents continue to generate among Palestine refugees across Syria. In the strongest possible terms, UNRWA reiterates its demand that all parties to the conflict in Syria comply with their obligations under international law and desist from targeting or otherwise conducting armed conflict in civilian areas. UNRWA calls again on all parties to seek a resolution of the Syria conflict through dialogue and political negotiations.

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.