

UN refugee agency starts airlift into northeast Syria

By UNHCR | 17 December 2013 | [Español](#)

QAMISHLY, Syria, December 17 (UNHCR) - The UN refugee agency today started an airlift of relief items from Iraq into northeast Syria's Al Hassakeh governorate to help more than 50,000 extremely vulnerable and displaced Syrians cope with the sudden arrival of winter following an agreement with both the Iraqi and Syrian authorities to open new aid routes.

UNHCR's chartered Iluyshin IL-76 cargo aircraft landed in Qamishly loaded with 7,000 thermal blankets, 1,400 plastic tarpaulins, 1,400 kitchen sets, 4,200 sleeping mats and 1,400 jerry cans. Over the next week the refugee agency plans 12 flights from Erbil, Iraq.

The aid flights are part of an inter-agency airlift involving also the UN World Food Programme and UNICEF that commenced Sunday with the arrival of a WFP aircraft carrying 40 metric tons of food. The UN's leading humanitarian agencies plan a total of 23 flights into Qamishly to reach needy families in Al Hassakeh governorate since overland deliveries of humanitarian assistance from Damascus have been perilous since May.

"These relief items will help displaced families in one of Syria's most remote regions to survive a bitter winter," said UNHCR Representative Tarik Kurdi. "Many needy families lost nearly everything when they fled the conflict, so UNHCR's core relief items are much-needed."

Some 188,000 displaced persons reside in Al Hassakeh Governorate. The items being airlifted by UNHCR will help 10,000 families to survive the winter. UNHCR plans to start distributing the relief items immediately.

Over 2013 UNHCR has delivered aid to some 3.2 million people in all of Syria's 14 governorates, distributing more than 7.7 million various relief items.

"We need to get more relief items to people across the Syria and this airlift will ensure we have urgent supplies on hand for those most in need as the winter cold sweeps across the region," UNHCR's Tarik Kurdi said.

WFP is flying enough food to feed over 30,000 people for one month while UNICEF is sending health kits, water and sanitation equipment. The joint UN airlift marks the first delivery of UN assistance from Iraq to Syria. UNHCR has operated a smaller airlift into Qamishly from the Syrian capital Damascus since July to delivery urgently needed humanitarian supplies and polio vaccines.

Every week UNHCR continues to dispatch 250 trucks throughout Syria carrying relief aid to support some 75,000 persons. The most recent deliveries were to rural Damascus and Idlib in northwestern Syria. With the start of UNHCR's flights in Qamishly, the agency's personnel will be working with local partner agencies to delivery items to needy families in hamlets around the city and near Al Hassakeh city, further south.

The UN refugee agency has maintained an office in Al Hassakeh since 2010 and expanded its presence in Qamishly in May to help address needs in the eastern region. Because of its unique access in Al Hassakeh, UNHCR has been registering displaced persons and providing assistance with core relief items like shelter material, blankets, cooking sets, sleeping mats, hygienic supplies, diapers and other aid alongside cash distributions to help vulnerable families and also providing health care.

UNHCR has some 340 personnel working throughout Syria. On Monday, UN agencies and non-governmental partners launched a joint appeal seeking \$2.3 billion for relief activities inside Syria over 2014, where UNOCHA estimates that 9.3 million people are vulnerable and need aid, including 6.5 million internally displaced persons.

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