

UNHCR opens a new office in southern Syria and transfers humanitarian assistance convoys across the Jordanian border to Syria

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The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) opened on Wednesday its new field office in the southern governorate of Sweida.

UNHCR continues to expand its humanitarian operation to support the increasing number of internally displaced Syrians (IDPs). “We are committed to expanding our humanitarian response to reach all those desperately in need of humanitarian assistance across Syria. UNHCR’s efforts focus on reaching out to the most vulnerable people wherever they may be in Syria” said Tarik Kurdi, UNHCR Representative in Syria.

Sweida office will cover the southern area in Syria where more than 550,000 IDPs live and will provide all the services provided by the Refugee Agency in other parts of Syria, including the distribution of basic relief items, the rehabilitation of collective shelters and the provision of health, educational and legal services. The office will also become a hub for the coordination of the transfer of humanitarian relief supplies across the Syrian-Jordanian border, particularly to Daraa governorate and surrounding areas including in hard-to-reach areas.

Today, the Refugee Agency has transported 25,000 blankets, 10,000 sleeping mats, 2,500 kitchen sets, 2,000 plastic sheets and 5,000 jerry cans through the Jordanian border. Items were delivered to UNHCR’s new warehouse in Sweida for onward distribution to people in need in the governorates of Sweida and Daraa.

“In addition to facilitating the transfer of relief items across the Jordanian border, the Syrian authorities have also informed us officially today that UNHCR will now be allowed to distribute relief supplies in the southern governorates without the need to transfer them to Damascus first, which will contribute effectively to facilitating and accelerating the delivery of much-needed relief items to the most vulnerable not only in areas that are easily accessible, but also in disputed and hard-to-reach areas. This will help UNHCR improve its effectiveness under the present circumstances”, Mr. Kurdi said.

Mr. Kurdi added that almost all transport services across the Jordanian border as well as UNHCR warehouses in Sweida governorate will be available for use by other UN humanitarian agencies operating in Syria.

In view of the rapidly increasing needs in Syria, decentralization is an essential component of UNHCR’s strategy to scale up its humanitarian assistance and outreach in the country. UNHCR is permanently present in Damascus, Aleppo, Hassakeh, Qamishly, Homs, Tartous, and now in Sweida.

“As the humanitarian response in Syria continues to scale-up, field offices are extremely important as they enable more effective programming and help UNHCR and other humanitarian actors in continuing to implement flexible approaches,” said Mr. Kurdi.

In 2014, UNHCR has so far distributed over 8 million CRIs to some 2.3 million beneficiaries in 13 out of Syria’s 14 governorates.

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