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The situation of the Yarmouk refugee camp in Syria

European Parliament resolution of 30 April 2015 on the situation of the Yarmouk refugee camp in Syria (2015/2664(RSP))

(2016/C 346/17)

The European Parliament,

— having regard to international humanitarian law,

— having regard to its previous resolutions on Syria,

— having regard to the statement of 10 April 2015 by the Vice-President of the Commission/High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (VP/HR) and the Commissioner for Humanitarian Aid and Crisis Management on the situation in Yarmouk, Syria,

— having regard to the declaration of 18 April 2015 by the VP/HR on behalf of the European Union on the situation in the Yarmouk Palestinian refugee camp in Syria,

— having regard to UN Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014) and 2191(2014),

— having regard to Rules 135(5) and 123(4) of its Rules of Procedure,

A. whereas IS/Da'esh attacked the Palestinian refugee camp in Yarmouk on 1 April 2015; whereas the Assad regime continued the shelling and aerial bombardment of the camp in response to the IS attack and intensive street battles between anti-Assad armed opposition groups, Aknaf Bait al-Makdis on the one hand and IS/Da'esh and Jabhat al-Nusra on the other occurred throughout the camp; whereas on 16 April 2015 Palestinian military units, with the assistance of Syrian rebels, forced IS/Da'esh fighters to retreat from the camp; whereas IS/Da'esh's withdrawal leaves al-Qaeda affiliate Jabhat al-Nusra largely in control of the camp;

B. whereas Yarmouk, the largest Palestinian refugee camp in Syria, formed in 1957 to accommodate people fleeing the Arab-Israeli conflict, has been engulfed in fighting between the Syrian government and armed groups such as Jabhat al-Nusra and the Free Syrian Army; whereas before the Syrian conflict more than 160 000 civilians lived in the camp, while today only 18 000 remain;

C. whereas the 480 000 Palestinian refugees remain a particularly vulnerable group in the crisis in Syria; whereas they are scattered in over 60 camps throughout the region; whereas 95 % of Palestinian refugees currently rely on the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) to meet their daily food, water and healthcare needs;

D. whereas the civilian population in the Yarmouk camp have been besieged since December 2012 and subjected to indiscriminate bombing and shelling by the Assad regime, and continue to be trapped inside the camp; whereas, according to UNRWA, 18 000 Palestinian and Syrian civilians in Yarmouk, including 3 500 children, are in need of the most basic humanitarian aid;

E. whereas there is a permanent health crisis in the camp, with a typhoid epidemic having occurred in 2014 and Hepatitis A and water-related illnesses being endemic, as well as malnutrition, with all the known consequences;

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F. whereas the UN Security Council has called on all parties to the Syrian civil war to permit humanitarian access to the Yarmouk camp and allow humanitarian aid to reach it without obstruction;

G. whereas the Commission has released immediate emergency funding of EUR 2,5 million for UNRWA's operations to deliver life-saving assistance to Palestinian refugees in Syria through cash and emergency relief items;

H. whereas in addition, and as part of the EU's 2015 humanitarian funding for Syria, support will facilitate a rapid humanitarian response to meet the needs of vulnerable families; whereas this funding extends to all parts of Syria affected by the conflict, with specific focus on the recent violence in Yarmouk, Idlib, Dara'a and Aleppo;

I. whereas the ongoing denial of humanitarian access to the refugees living in the Yarmouk camp by the Syrian regime and other belligerents is against international humanitarian law; whereas the capacity of UNRWA to sustain life-saving emergency interventions, responding to urgent developments such as that impacting Yarmouk, is gravely undermined by chronic underfunding for humanitarian interventions inside Syria;

1. Expresses its deep concern at the continued deterioration of the security and humanitarian situation in Syria, and in particular in the Yarmouk Palestinian refugee camp and other Palestinian camps; reiterates its strong commitment to supporting the victims of the Syrian conflict;

2. Condemns the takeover of the Yarmouk camp and the acts of terrorism perpetrated by IS/Da'esh and Jabhat al-Nusra, as well as the siege laid to Yarmouk by the Assad regime and the bombardment of the camp, including through barrel bombs, which cause horrific suffering to the affected population; calls for an immediate lifting of the siege and an end to all attacks on the civilian population;

3. Expresses its concern regarding all human rights defenders detained in the Yarmouk camp and those currently held in custody by the Syrian security forces; calls on all armed groups in the Yarmouk camp to end their targeting of human rights defenders;

4. Urges respect for the neutral status of Yarmouk and the protection of the civilians inside the camp, particularly women and children, as well as the safeguarding of medical facilities, schools and places of refuge;

5. Stresses that the ongoing war in Syria and the threat posed by IS/Da'esh constitute a serious danger to the people of Syria and to the broader Middle East; calls for the EU to contribute to joint efforts to mitigate the humanitarian crisis and play a role in helping neighbouring countries provide shelter for refugees fleeing the conflict in Syria, many of whom are losing their lives on boats in the Mediterranean;

6. Calls for the implementation of UN Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014) and 2191 (2014) throughout the territory of Syria; urges all parties involved in the conflict to allow UNRWA, ICRC and other international aid organisations unhindered access to the Yarmouk refugee camp, to enable immediate and unconditional humanitarian access, to evacuate wounded civilians and provide safe passage for all civilians wishing to leave the camp; calls for the establishment of humanitarian corridors that are controlled neither by the Syrian regime nor by IS/Da'esh and Jabhat al-Nusra, in light of their gross and continuous violations of international humanitarian law;

7. Welcomes the release by the Commission of immediate emergency funding to the sum of EUR 2,5 million for UNRWA's operations to deliver life-saving assistance to Palestinian refugees in Syria; commends UNRWA for the important work it is doing and expresses its strong commitment to continuing to work together with UNRWA Commissioner-General Pierre Krähenbühl and all other partners to help alleviate the suffering of those in greatest need; stresses the need for the EU

and its Member States to increase their support for UNRWA for the emergency relief effort for civilians in Yarmouk and other parts of Syria, ensuring that all Palestine refugees, host communities and others have the assistance they need; urges the EU to participate in the funding of the USD 30 million UNRWA emergency appeal and to provide diplomatic and political support for UNRWA;

8. Strongly condemns the abuses against children, massacres, torture, killings and sexual violence to which the Syrian population is victim; stresses the importance of taking appropriate steps to ensure the safety of innocent civilians, including women and children; acknowledges that women and girls are frequent victims of war rape in the Syrian conflict, including in regime prisons; underlines the Geneva Conventions' common Article 3 guaranteeing the wounded and sick all the necessary medical care required by their condition without adverse distinction; urges humanitarian aid providers to provide the full range of health services in EU-funded humanitarian facilities;

9. Expresses its full support for the efforts of UN Special Envoy to Syria Staffan de Mistura in aiming for local ceasefires and the implementation of humanitarian pauses by all sides to allow the delivery of humanitarian assistance; reiterates its calls on the EU to take the initiative for diplomatic efforts to that end;

10. Reiterates its call for a sustainable solution to the Syrian conflict through an inclusive and Syrian-led political process on the basis of the Geneva communiqué of June 2012, leading to a genuine political transition that meets the legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people and enables them independently and democratically to determine their own future; welcomes the announcement that renewed Geneva talks will be held in May between the Assad regime, the opposition, UNSC members and regional powers including Iran;

11. Remains convinced that there can be no sustainable peace in Syria without accountability for the crimes committed by all sides during the conflict, including in relation to the Yarmouk camp; reiterates its call for the referral of the situation in Syria to the International Criminal Court; calls on the EU and its Member States to seriously consider the recent recommendation by the UN Commission of Inquiry to explore the setting-up of a special tribunal for the crimes committed in Syria;

12. Believes Parliament must carry out an ad hoc visit to the Yarmouk refugee camp in order to independently assess the humanitarian situation, as soon as security conditions allow, in coordination with the UN and independently of the Assad regime or any other party to the conflict;

13. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Vice-President of the Commission/High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, the Council, the Commission, the governments and parliaments of the Member States, the Secretary-General of the United Nations, the UN-Arab League Special Envoy to Syria, the Secretary-General of the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf, the President of the Palestinian Authority, the Palestinian Legislative Council and all the parties involved in the conflict in Syria.