

Palestine refugees go missing in the Mediterranean Sea

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After Palestine refugees go missing in the Mediterranean Sea, UNRWA draws attention to the acuteness of their plight in Syria.

In the last few days, UNRWA received reports of Palestine refugees going missing in capsized boats off the coast of Egypt and Malta. At the same time, escalation in fighting in Deraa, Yarmouk and other camps in Rif Damascus has led to worrying increase in the death toll of Palestine refugees.

“These dreadful developments underline the importance of ending hostilities to avoid tragic loss of life. I reiterate the need to address the particular vulnerability of the Palestine refugees in Syria in the current conflict,” said Filippo Grandi, Commissioner-General of UNRWA. “This very complex crisis has a Palestinian dimension which must be addressed,” he added.

Like the Syrians caught in the cross-fire of the conflict, many of the over half a million Palestine refugees registered with UNRWA in Syria have lost family members, homes and means of livelihood. UNRWA estimates that approximately 420,000 are in dire need of relief, of which 235,000 are internally displaced. Most Palestinian camps have been overrun by violent fighting, leaving inhabitants in an increasingly desperate state. UNRWA estimates that 70,000 have left to countries in the region like Lebanon, Jordan, Egypt, Turkey, Libya and Gaza among others.

Palestine refugees, already suffering poverty, have very limited options for external flight. News of many missing after boats heading to Europe capsized in the Mediterranean Sea Europe is proof of the Palestine refugees’ extreme vulnerability, of their lack of safer options, and of growing desperation.

UNRWA repeats its appeal to all concerned parties to end the suffering, comply with their obligations under international law and resolve the conflict in Syria through negotiation. These recent tragic events bring into sharp focus the particular plight of the Palestine refugees, who continue to require protection pending a just and durable solution to the refugee issue in the context of a Palestinian-Israeli peace agreement.

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.