

# UNRWA strongly condemns school explosion in southern Syria

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## Statement attributable to UNRWA's Director of Operations in Syria, Michael Kingsley

The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA) strongly condemns the parties responsible for an explosion close to UNRWA's Turaan School in Muzerib, 11 km north-west of Dera'a City, southern Syria, in which some 40 school children were injured, along with four UNRWA school staff. One of the UNRWA staff members sustained serious injuries to his chest. The children, all between six and ten years of age, were struck by glass shattered by the force of the explosion as they sat in their classrooms during the morning shift.

The explosion occurred at 09:45 hrs on 10 February, while approximately 270 children were attending class. It was reportedly the result of an air-to-ground strike. The injury toll could have been much higher and it is extremely fortunate that there were no fatalities.

UNRWA deplores this attack on an UNRWA school premises and the serious physical and psychological harm caused to hundreds of Palestine refugee children. The incident is a serious violation of international law, not least because the school is a flagged United Nations facility. It comes only three months after the UNRWA Health Centre in Dera'a city was destroyed in a similar strike.

In the strongest possible terms, UNRWA reiterates its demand that all parties to the Syria conflict comply with their obligations under international law and desist from conducting conflict in civilian areas. All parties to the conflict are responsible for ensuring that schools, hospitals and UN facilities are protected from attacks and other violations. UNRWA calls again on the 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.