

UNRWA Shocked by the Death of Two Palestine Refugees in Dera'a, Appeals for Safety of Civilians

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03 March 2020



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Statement by UNRWA Acting Commissioner General, Christian Saunders

On the evening of 28 February, Raghad and Laila were killed by an improvised explosive device (IED) while walking back to their home in Dera'a camp, Palestine refugee camp located in southern Syria, after having bought bread at the local bakery. Raghad was just 10- years-old and her aunt Laila was 53.

This shocking incident occurred amidst rising tensions in the south of Syria in recent months, marked by incidents of kidnapping, targeted killings and the use of improvised explosive devices like the one that killed Raghad and Laila.

Less than three weeks ago, the Palestine refugee community in Dera'a camp had come together to celebrate the inauguration of an UNRWA school after it had been rehabilitated. Today, this same school community comes together in mourning to mark the loss of one of their students. As of February 2020, some 800 families had returned to the camp and 750 students to the UNRWA school.

Dera'a camp used to be home to some 10,500 Palestine refugees before the conflict in Syria led to large scale destruction and displacement. All UNRWA facilities in the camp have suffered high levels of damage and nearly 90 per cent of the camp residents were displaced. The opening of the school was supposed to be a symbol of hope, particularly for the camp's children, many of whom have only known a world of war and devastation.

Indiscriminate use or the targeting of the IEDs against civilians or civilian objects is strictly prohibited under International Humanitarian Law.

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 5.6 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.