

UNRWA's Commissioner-General deplores the killing of 18, including five Palestine refugee children, in southern Syria

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I am shocked and outraged to have to report that at least 18 people were killed yesterday, including five Palestine refugee school children and an UNRWA staff member, when an explosive struck near UNRWA's Zeitoun school in Muzeirib, 11 km north-west of Dera'a in southern Syria, between 11:00 and 12:00. At least 20 others were injured, including two staff members and eight school children, two of whom have lost limbs.

This comes just eight days after UNRWA condemned an explosion that injured 40 school children at UNRWA's Turaan School in the same town.

Five ninth graders, who has just left their UNRWA school, were killed:

Mohammad Ghaleb Al-Dali

Ahmad Hasan Al-Dali

Yazan Bashar Hasan

Hayel Mohammad Ayed

Zakaraya Saleh Saleh

A staff nurse, Houriyeh Ahmad al-Seid, age 50, who was working in the nearby UNRWA clinic at the time, was also killed. Our hearts go out to all the parents and families at this devastating time.

I must express my revulsion at this wanton disregard for civilian life and international law. All parties to the conflict are obliged to ensure that civilians and UN installations are protected. Yesterday's tragedy demonstrates beyond doubt that the conflict in Syria can only be stopped through dialogue and political negotiations. Militarization must cease. I urge the parties and the international community to act together now because the children and people of Syria depend on all of us.

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.