

Statement by UNRWA on today's events in Yarmouk camp, Syria

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Horrific images captured by news agencies, and reports of numerous casualties and the flight of Palestine refugees from Yarmouk camp are being followed up and assessed by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) with extreme worry and grave concern.

Initial reports indicate that air strikes hit the centre of Yarmouk, and the camp is said to be in a chaotic state; with ongoing fighting in the southern parts of the camp inching north-wards, and reports coming in of families trying to escape on foot as cars and other forms of transportation are not able to move within the camp.

UNRWA has repeatedly warned that if all parties to the Syrian armed conflict fail to fulfil their obligations to protect Palestine refugees and respect their neutrality, the consequences would be devastating and long lasting. The Agency has advocated to maintain the neutrality of the 525,000 Palestine refugees in Syria and not implicate them in the conflict. The horrible events of today raise serious questions about the stability and protection of the Palestine refugees in Syria.

Thus far, a significant number of Palestine refugees, as well as Syrians, have been killed, injured and compelled to leave. The killings in Yarmouk today send a clear and unfortunate signal that calls by UNRWA and others on all parties to spare civilians and to respect the neutrality of Palestine refugees are going unheeded.

UNRWA Commissioner-General Filippo Grandi has appealed to the Syrian authorities, and all parties to the conflict, to safeguard the security of Palestine refugees wherever they reside in Syria. Grandi's appeal takes on an urgent nature following today's events.

The Agency will continue to monitor the situation as it evolves, and its dedicated staff will continue to assess the situation and render any needed assistance.

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.