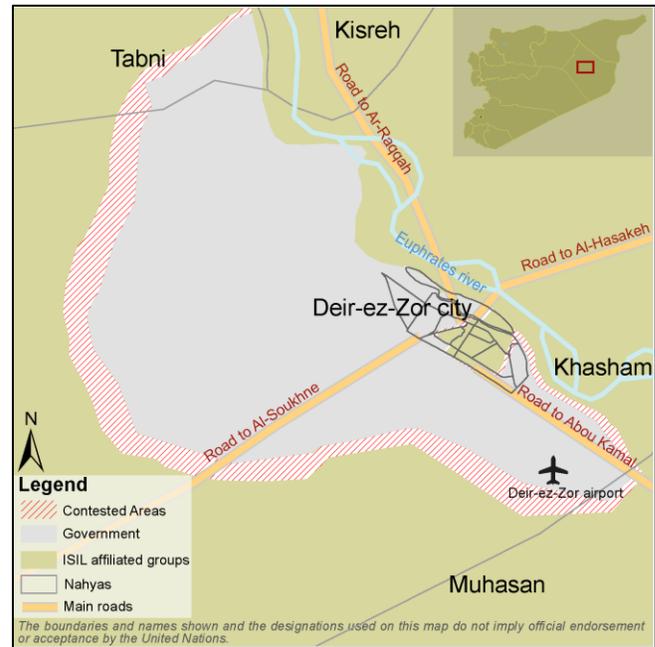


## Highlights

- An estimated 200,000 people, most of whom are women and children, are facing sharply deteriorating conditions in the besieged western side of Deir-Ez-Zor city;
- While government stocks continue to provide bread, there are very limited supplies in the city as there has been almost no humanitarian or commercial access to the area.
- Residents are in immediate and urgent need of humanitarian assistance, particularly food, nutrition and health supplies;
- There are reports of severe cases of malnutrition and deaths due to starvation.
- On 15 January, the Government of Russia announced that they dropped 22 MT of relief supplies from the air.



## Situation Overview

The city of Deir-Ez-Zor in Deir-Ez-Zor governorate, 450 km to the northeast from the capital Damascus, is currently hosting an estimated 214,000 inhabitants, of whom about 200,000 live in the Government controlled areas of the city. Since June 2013, Government of Syria (GoS) forces have been confined to a few neighbourhoods in western Deir-ez-Zor City – namely Joura, al-Qusoor and Al Muhajereen – as well as Deir-ez-Zor airport east of the city, and a stretch of military bases just south of the city. The western side of the city is hosting an estimated 150,000 IDPs, most of whom are from the eastern side of the city or other areas of Deir-Ez-Zor governorate. Since mid-January 2015, ISIL has closed access to the city, leading the ERC to declare the western GoS controlled neighbourhoods of Deir Ez-Zor city as besieged by ISIL in March 2015.

Living conditions in the city has deteriorated significantly due to the ban on all commercial or humanitarian access into the besieged city by ISIL, as well as the inability of residents to move outside of the city. The residents' freedom of movement is constrained by ISIL which interrogate and harass people leaving the city and confiscate their documents, as well as by the GoS which requires those wishing to leave by land or air to obtain authorisation from government authorities. The only access to the city has been via air to the airport controlled by GoS. However, due to the proximity of the front line from the airport, fixed wing aircrafts have not been able to land there since September 2015, with only helicopter flights to and from Quamishli linking the city to the outside world.

## **Humanitarian Situation**

The restrictions imposed on the besieged city have led to a severe shortage of food, medicine and basic commodities. Goods and foodstuff that are available are at highly inflated prices. Most of the food available appears to be from produce grown in a very small patch of land in an area under GoS control; with the exception of the grain reserve used to make bread. Merchants are also airlifting limited amounts of goods. A kilogram of sugar reportedly can cost SYP5,000 (US\$ 12) and a litre of oil as much as SYP6,000 (US\$ 15), whilst a kilo of lamb can reach SYP13,000 (US\$32) almost four times the price in Damascus. Inflation and shortages indicate that supply is increasingly insufficient to meet the needs of the city's residents. Additionally, the town has not had any electricity supply for over ten months and there is only very little fuel available from a local oil field and makeshift refinery, insufficient to operate bakeries, generators and water pumps. As a result, water is available only once a week for three hours. The last reserves of chlorine were exhausted in June 2015.

Although there are two main functioning bakeries and sufficient grain supplies for bread production for many months through the government strategic reserve, the lack of fuel and inflated cost of yeast has raised the price of bread to between SYP200 per bundle from bakeries and SYP 800 per bundle on the black market (approximately between double and eight times the cost in Damascus). Families have to queue for hours to get their share of bread with the majority of inhabitants surviving on bread and water. Severe cases of malnutrition are reported by health personnel particularly amongst children with unverified reports of 15 – 20 people dying from starvation in 2015 (of whom four were children). Children are also reportedly suffering from vitamin and mineral deficiencies. All schools are functioning in the city however absenteeism amongst children is common as children suffer from frequent fainting due to malnutrition.

The only remaining civilian hospital in the besieged city is suffering from a severe lack of medicine, supplies and health personnel. The hospital is 2 kilometres outside of the city and thus difficult for civilians to access particularly as transportation costs are high. None of the eight health centres previously present in the city are functioning due to a lack of medication, particularly for chronic diseases, reproductive health supplies and personnel. Cases of Leishmaniasis and Typhoid have also been reported in the besieged city as a result of the poor sanitation as well as due to the hindered medical response.

Shelter conditions are also reportedly of concern, with the housing stock being insufficient to accommodate the IDPs leading to overcrowding and a steep rise in rent prices. There are 12 collective shelters in the besieged city reportedly approximately 1,400 families and several informal collective shelters where 68 families are residing. Those living in substandard shelter conditions are unable to improve their shelters due to the lack of cash, building materials or NFIs. Despite the inability of many to pay their rents, no evictions have been reported thus far.

Seventy per cent of those living in the besieged city are reportedly women and children. Most of the men have already left or have been reportedly recruited into the army. The 2015 summer recruitment campaign reportedly targeted 16 – 42 year old males with a total of approximately 1,000 young men recruited during 2015.

Anti-personal mines line two different routes out of the besieged city. One of these routes is the Al Soukhne road that leads to Damascus, where 25 individuals have reportedly been killed or injured by mines whilst trying to leave the city. Due to these deaths, the route is no longer used as a smuggling route. The

route that is currently used to exit the city after authorisation by government authorities also contains anti-personal mines either side of the last GoS checkpoint along the route. This route continues to be used by those paying to leave the city.

## **Humanitarian Response**

The UN requested MoFA approval in May 2015 to send humanitarian supplies to the besieged area of Deir-Ez-Zor city through 73 airlift rotations within 3 months. The approval came in principle in June 2015; however insecurity and insufficient landing slots at the airport prevented the delivery of aid from June to September, after which the airport became inaccessible for fixed winged aircrafts.

Humanitarian assistance was reportedly delivered via airlift by SARC and ICRC in several shipments during 2015; the last of which was on 12 August 2015 when two tonnes of food supplies were delivered. The two tonne delivery was part of a large shipment of rice and oil that SARC transported in stages in cooperation with ICRC.

Eight approved NNGOs remain in GoS-controlled areas, of which five have partnerships with the United Nations Agencies, and work in different sectors such as Food, NFIs/Shelter and Health. UNDP has supported the establishment of a local pastry kitchen by a local NNGO in Deir-Ez-Zor city. The kitchen is able to provide pastries depending on the availability of funds to procure the raw materials needed. Furthermore in November 2015, The NNGO Syria Trust for Development distributed 160 boxes of high energy biscuits and 234 parcels of nutritional supplies provided by UNICEF. Also in November, FAO in collaboration with the private sector managed to smuggle 3,000 sheep into the besieged city whilst at the end of December 2015, the agency delivered vegetable seeds for 300 families to grow produce at home to enable self-sufficiency.

More recently on 11 January 2016, the GoS airlifted a limited amount of basic commodities, including food to be sold at General Consumer Establishment prices, thus similar to prices in Damascus.

On 14 January, the Government of Russia announced that it had dropped 22 MT of relief supplies by air into the besieged city and that such operations would continue.

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