



**THE UNITED NATIONS IN THE SYRIAN ARAB REPUBLIC STATEMENT
EXPRESSING CONCERN FOR THE PROTECTION OF CIVILIANS IN HAJIN
AND CONDITIONS IN RUKBAN**

DAMASCUS, 15 January 2019

The United Nations in Syria is gravely concerned about the protection of thousands of people who are estimated to remain trapped by ongoing hostilities in ISIL-held areas of Hajin in south-eastern Deir-ez-Zor Governorate, as well as for some 11,000 thousand people who have fled these areas since the beginning of December. The United Nations is also deeply worried about the dire humanitarian situation at the Rukban makeshift settlement in southern Syria, where more than 40,000 people remain displaced in urgent need of assistance.

The ongoing fighting in Hajin is taking a heavy toll on civilians. Those leaving the areas of active hostilities have reported many civilian casualties, including women and children, critical shortages of food and medical supplies, and large-scale destruction of civilian infrastructure. Due to ongoing insecurity, humanitarian access to civilians who remain in the Hajin area and to people on the move remains severely restricted.

Civilians leaving the Hajin area, the majority of whom are women, children and elderly people, undertake an arduous journey to escape the violence, with most of those displaced arriving at Al Hole camp in Al-Hasakeh Governorate. People fleeing face serious protection risks along the way, including exposure to hostilities, explosive hazard contamination and long waiting periods at screening points in harsh winter conditions. Consequently, many of those arriving to Al Hole are extremely exhausted and seven young children have died shortly after arriving. According to the displaced persons, the movement to Al Hole camp is carried out without their consent and many would prefer to remain in Deir-ez-Zor areas.

At the Rukban settlement, conditions for displaced people, the majority of whom are women and children, are increasingly desperate and the situation is exacerbated by the winter cold. With limited access to food, medical care and other support and with the continued restrictions on humanitarian access, people are in urgent need of assistance and protection. The cold weather, lack of healthcare facilities and limited access to clean water greatly increase the risk of health concerns. Several young children have reportedly died at the site since the beginning of December. The last time the United Nations had access to Rukban was in November, where an inter-agency convoy, jointly with the Syrian Arab Red Crescent, delivered food, medical and other assistance.

The United Nations strongly calls upon all parties to the conflict, and those with influence over them, to take all measures to protect civilians and civilian infrastructure in line with their obligations under International Humanitarian and International Human Rights Law.

The United Nations further calls on all parties to facilitate unhindered and sustained humanitarian access to all people in need in Hajin and Rukban, and to minimize the distress and unnecessary suffering for the civilian population, both for those in transit from Hajin and those currently stranded in Rukban.

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