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Human rights situations that require the Council's attention

Written statement* submitted by The Palestinian Return Centre Ltd, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[03 June 2019]

* Issued as received, in the language(s) of submission only.



Palestinians from the Syrian Arab Republic in Jordan

Introduction

The bloody warfare in the Syrian Arab Republic (SAR) has given birth to a tide of mass-exodus, with thousands of families fleeing the war-torn country in the hunt for a safe shelter. Neighboring Jordan has served as one of the destinations in which dozens of displaced families disembarked to take a momentary respite from the daily scenes of destruction, bloodshed, and dislodgement.

Palestinians from the Syrian Arab Republic in Jordan

Dozens of Palestinian refugees flocked to Jordan via borderlands with SAR after tension hit a zenith in the war-ragged country. Soon after the bloody warfare saw the day in March 2011, scores of Palestinian refugees crossed the borders with Jordan and set up roots in Jordanian cities and refugee camps, with several of them carrying Jordanian travel documents or having acquaintances and relatives in the host country.

PRS in Jordan are mainly scattered across Irbid, AlZarkaa, Amman, AlMafreq, AlZaatari Camp, and King Abdullah Gardens. The average family consists of 4.1 persons.

According to UNRWA estimates, minors aged below 18 make up 47% of PRS; females make up 52% and males 48%.¹

UNRWA said in its report “Syria Regional Crisis Emergency Appeal 2018” that 31% of recorded PRS are members of female-headed households, which increases their vulnerability.

At the same time, 56% of PRS in Jordan hold Jordanian documents while 22% are holders of Palestinian documents. The remaining 21% carry Syrian documents.

Legal Status of PRS

Jordan has not allowed all groups from Syria to seek refuge in the country. At a certain point in time, the government opted for a closed-door policy. Authorities began denying entry to Palestinians living in Syria, officially declared a non-admittance policy.

According to a report by Human Rights Watch (HRW), approximately 1,300 reported entering Jordan before authorities began pushbacks of Palestinians at the Syrian border.²

In accordance with this policy, Jordanian security forces turn away Palestinians from Syria at Jordan’s borders, and seek to detain and deport back to Syria those who enter at unofficial border crossings using forged Syrian identity documents, or those who enter illegally via smuggling networks, HRW said in the report.

HRW added that deportations of Palestinians to Syria are a violation of Jordan’s international obligation of nonrefoulement, the international customary law prohibition on the return of refugees and asylum seekers to places where their lives or freedom would be threatened or the return of anyone to the risk of torture.

As a result of the Jordanian government’s crackdowns, many PRS have remained vulnerable to exploitation, detention and forced deportation. Their lack of legal status and corresponding protection risks in Jordan are a source of major concern.³

¹ https://www.unrwa.org/sites/default/files/content/resources/2018_syria_ea_fact_sheet_v4.pdf

² <https://www.hrw.org/report/2014/08/07/not-welcome/jordans-treatment-palestinians-escaping-syria>

³ <https://www.unrwa.org/prs-jordan>

PRS in Jordan and UNRWA's role

The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) provides cash aids to 98.7% of families who are in need of food and non-food items.⁴

UNRWA helps cover the refugees' primary and life-saving secondary and tertiary health-care needs through its health premises. UNRWA operates a network of 25 health care centres and four mobile dental clinics in and around Palestinian refugee camps in Jordan.⁵

PRS have been able to continue their education despite conflict and displacement. PRS students have had access to education through regular/special classes and alternative learning modalities. According to UNRWA data, 1,396 PRS got enrolled at UNRWA schools in Jordan and received classes until the completion of Grade 10, the final grade for which UNRWA pays complete funding.⁶

UNRWA also provides short-term vocational and technical training classes for PRS.

Yet, such services do not meet the refugees' increasing needs, at a time when poverty and unemployment rates among PRS have seen striking leaps.

An assessment of UNRWA's output by the Palestinian refugee communities from the Syria Arab Republic, as figures in a poll published by AGPS on its official website, found out that 61.4% of PRS in Jordan believe the relief and cash aids provided by the agency do not meet their demands. 24.3% said they are insufficient.

64.3% of respondents also dubbed the quantities of distributed in-kind aids as very small; 15.7% said they are "insufficient", according to the same poll.

As for health-care services, 2.8% of respondents said medical check-ups are "excellent"; 18.6% said they are "good"; while 40% dubbed them as "poor".

Recommendations

PRS in Jordan continue to sound distress signals over the exacerbated humanitarian conditions they have been enduring in the country. Their situation has taken a serious turn for the worse due to UNRWA's funding crisis. Urgent action should be made before it is too late:

UNRWA should work on increasing cash aids so as to enable PRS to cover their rental and power/water fees, among other vital expenses.

Emergency allowances should be shelled out following coordination with the Jordanian Ministry of Health to enable patients to access health facilities, undergo urgent surgeries, and receive life-saving therapy and medicines.

PRS should have unrestricted access to the local labor market in order to help them secure livelihoods to feed their starved children.

PRS's access to educational facilities and adequate funding in this regard are imperative.

Donor countries and local and international aid agencies should act to adequately address the humanitarian concerns facing PRS in Jordan

Jordan should seriously reconsider the recent policy of non-admittance for PRS, a policy that stands in sharp contrast to Jordan's treatment of Syrian nationals, upon whom Jordan has not placed any formal entry restrictions.

All concerned parties should combine forces to secure PRS' humanitarian, legal, and physical protection at the soonest possible time.

⁴ https://unrwa.es/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/2015_syria_emergency_appeal_annual_report.pdf

⁵ https://unrwa.es/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/2015_syria_emergency_appeal_annual_report.pdf

⁶ https://www.unrwa.org/sites/default/files/content/resources/2018_syria_ea_fact_sheet_v4.pdf