



## Briefing on latest security measures in the Ein El-Hilweh Palestine refugee camp in Lebanon

Electronic security gates were installed by the Lebanese army on the 12th June 2018. The security gates were installed on the four entrances to the Ein el-Hilweh camp: Al-Ta'mir, Darb al-Sim, al-Hesbah and the public hospital. In addition to the entrance to al-Miyya-Mieh camp, the Lebanese army has deployed electronic inspection gates to and from the camp by the entrants in order to increase security measures and detect any attempt to smuggle individual weapons.

On the night of the instalment of security gates, a march was launched in the camps of Ein el-Hilweh, al-Miyah-Mieh from the mosques of the camps after the prayers in response to the Lebanese army's decision to set up electronic gates and security measures at the entrances to the camps to search Palestinian refugees. The recent security measures negatively affect the conditions of camp residents and the movement in the city of Sidon in general since that the camp is a neighbourhood of the city. The tight security measures imposed by the army led to congestion at the checkpoints and obstructed the movement of civilians to their work, schools and jobs, and delayed the arrival of patients to hospitals.

The Palestinians in Lebanon called for easing the security measures at the entrances of the Ein el-Hilweh, al-Miyya-Mieh camps. In a statement, the Palestinian committees appealed to the Lebanese authorities to remove the electronic gates and stressed that the extensive security coordination between the Palestinian and Lebanese leaderships constitutes guarantee of security within and around the Palestinian camps in Lebanon. They pointed out that there are many measures that the army can take and do not impede the movement of civilians and have better results for maintaining security and stability.

### Background

The Ein El-Hilweh Palestinian refugee camp (EHC), located 3 km south-east of Saida, was established near the city of Sidon in 1948 by the International Committee of the Red Cross to accommodate refugees from northern Palestine<sup>1</sup>. It became the biggest camp in Lebanon, in terms of both population and area size. An estimated 80,000 people reside in and around the camp, in an area of 1.5 square km.



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The electronic gates are the latest in series of measures to ramp up security at Ein El-Hilweh and has provoked outrage among Palestinian factions and residents. The electronic gates are to be installed at the entrances to the refugee camp, screening everyone entering or leaving the camp. The Lebanese army said the wall and new e-gates would not negatively affect the camp<sup>7</sup>. But, in fact, the new e-gates will cause further friction between Palestinian residents and the army. Palestinian refugees living in the camp now have to submit themselves to Lebanese security forces daily for inspections.

The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) began operations in the camp in 1952. The Agency though does not manage or administer the camp, but it only provides essential services within<sup>2</sup>.

Camp residents suffer from high rates of poverty and unemployment and remain heavily dependent on UNRWA and NGO services for housing, health care, and education<sup>3</sup>. They have few independent sources of income, partly due to legal restrictions on work and property ownership. Ein El-Hilweh's inhabitants mainly work as casual labourers in construction sites, orchards and embroidery workshops, or as cleaners<sup>4</sup>. There is quite a high drop-out rate in schools as students are often forced to leave school in order to support their families. A number of displaced refugees continue to live on the edge of the camp in extremely poor conditions. The influx of high numbers of Palestinian Refugees from Syria (PRS) into an overcrowded urban space has put a further strain on already overstretched and inadequate infrastructure and services in the camp. It has also increased competition over scarce resources, jobs, and assistance, increasing the risk of community tension<sup>5</sup>. This situation has produced a tense and confrontational environment characterized by lawlessness and frequent break-downs into brief episodes of armed violence.

In November 2016, the Lebanese authorities had begun the construction of an isolation wall, with watchtowers to segregate the camp from surrounding areas due to heightened security concerns, as fugitives and extremists were reportedly using it as well, as a hideout from the Lebanese army.<sup>6</sup> The project was initially met with resistance from a number residents in the camp, calling it “the racist separation wall”, the “wall of shame” and saying that it was similar to the policies of the Israeli government.



## Endnotes

- 1 "South Lebanon: Ein El-Hilweh Camp Profile 2017." ReliefWeb. Accessed June 18, 2018. <https://reliefweb.int/report/lebanon/south-lebanon-ein-el-hilweh-camp-profile-2017>.
- 2 "Ein ElHilweh Camp." UNRWA. Accessed June 18, 2018. <https://www.unrwa.org/where-we-work/lebanon/ein-el-hilweh-camp>.
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 Data2.unhcr.org. (2018). [online] Available at: <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/61175> [Accessed 18 Jun. 2018].
- 5 Ibid.
- 6 Zaatari, Mohammed. 2018. "Palestinians Decry ‘E-Gates’ At Ain Al-Hilweh Entrances". The Daily Star Newspaper - Lebanon. <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2018/Jun-11/452790-palestinians-decry-e-gates-at-ain-al-hilweh-entrances.ashx>.
- 7 "Lebanese Army Installs E-Gates At Palestinian Refugee Camp". 2018. Alaraby. <https://www.alaraby.co.uk/english/news/2018/6/10/lebanese-army-installs-e-gates-at-palestinian-refugee-camp>.

