

United Nations Resident Coordinator and Humanitarian Coordinator in Syria, Imran Riza – Statement on the Humanitarian Situation in Al Hol

Damascus, 13 August 2020

The United Nations Resident Coordinator and Humanitarian Coordinator for Syria, Mr. Imran Riza, has expressed concern and alarm over the recent deaths of eight children under the age of five last week in Al Hol camp, Northeast Syria. The children, who died between 6 and 10 August, were suffering from a range of illnesses including malnutrition-related complications, dehydration from diarrhoea, heart failure, internal bleeding and hypoglycemia.

“I am deeply saddened by the news of these children’s deaths. It underscores the basic fact that no child should be forced to live under the challenging and potentially dangerous humanitarian conditions at Al Hol camp”, said Mr. Riza.

The UN and humanitarian partners continue to provide a range of critical assistance to Al Hol, including emergency, primary and reproductive health care; water trucking; shelter, NFIs, food and hygiene distributions; nutrition; and protection. However, access to some basic services, including regular water supply and emergency healthcare, has been increasingly compromised in recent months, for reasons such as disruptions to water supply from the Alouk water station and COVID-19 precautionary measures.

“While the UN and humanitarian partners have been taking steps to safely deliver all necessary services curtailed due to COVID-19, including malnutrition screening and surgeries, I emphasize that all parties must ensure families at Al Hol have reliable and regular access to water, health care and other basic items and services, as required by international humanitarian law. Above all, durable solutions must be found for every person living at the camp”, said Mr. Riza.

The tragic deaths have occurred at a time when health services at the camp are under increased pressure due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Since the beginning of August, five health workers at Al Hol have tested positive for COVID-19, leading to the temporary closure of one field hospital and disruptions to another, amid growing PPE shortages.

“As COVID-19 cases continue to rapidly climb across Syria, I stress that health care workers in particular must be safeguarded and protected against the risk of infection,” said Mr. Riza. “With a fragile health care system and a severely depleted health care workforce – estimated at around half of the numbers which existed prior to 2011 – Syria can ill-afford the loss of more qualified staff.”

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