UNRWA OFFICIAL STATEMENT

Escalation of violence in Syria claims the lives of three more Palestine refugees in Khan Eshieh camp

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East Jerusalem

The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) strongly condemns the ongoing escalation of the armed conflict in Syria which on 14 June claimed the lives of another three Palestine refugees in Khan Eshieh camp, and continues gravely to endanger the safety of civilians throughout the country.

On 14 June, at around 22:30hrs, as worshippers were returning to their homes after the evening prayer, the main road of Khan Eshieh camp was hit by an artillery shell in the vicinity of Al Reda Mosque. The explosion killed on the spot 37 year-old Amir Abu Hamdeh, 56 year-old Mahmoud Asa'ad Asa'ad and 47 year-old Ibrahim Mahmoud Khalil. The blast also seriously injured 45 year-old Ayman Zaher. UNRWA strongly condemns the parties responsible for these deaths. The thoughts and condolences of UNRWA staff are with the bereaved families.

These tragic deaths and grave injuries are the result of intense fighting in and around Khan Eshieh town involving the use of heavy weapons of indiscriminate effect. Since 17 May, at least nine Palestine refugees from Khan Eshieh camp have died, and many more have been injured.

UNRWA remains gravely concerned about the elevated risk of death and serious injury to Palestine refugees and other civilians in Khan Eshieh and in

other areas of Syria where the armed conflict continues to intensify. In recent weeks, numerous civilian lives have been lost due to increased levels of armed violence, including in Aleppo governorate and rural Damascus where the Palestine refugee camps of Khan Eshieh and Qabr Essit are located.

UNRWA reiterates its demands for all parties to desist from exposing civilians to the risks of armed conflict. It is imperative that all sides respect and comply with their international humanitarian law obligations to protect and safeguard lives of Palestine refugees and all civilians.

Background information on Khan Eshiesh camp :

UNRWA in Syria provides vital humanitarian support and health and education services to 450,000 Palestine refugees. Over 95 percent of the Palestine refugees are wholly reliant on UNRWA humanitarian aid.

Khan Eshieh camp, home to about 9,000 Palestine refugees, is located in a volatile area in the rural area south of Damascus, where spikes in violence have caused the death of at least nine Palestine refugees in the recent weeks. Since 2012, the farms and fields surrounding the camp have been active battlegrounds in which heavy weapons have been deployed with often indiscriminate impact. Some 75 UNRWA staff residing in the camp strive to maintain support to Palestine refugees through limited services offered in three schools, a health clinic, and a community centre. The Agency's work is impeded by the fact that since 2013, humanitarian access to Khan Eshieh has been constrained. To receive assistance, Palestine refugees must travel at great personal risk to UNRWA distribution centers in Sahnaya or Khan Dunoun.

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