Bi-weekly press briefing: Northern Syria update - WHO/UNHCR/OCHA/UNICEF/WFP

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Shotlist

1. Wide shot, exterior, Palais des Nations flag alley
2. Wide shot, podium with speakers
3. SOUNDbite (English) Jens Laerke, spokesperson, Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA):
   “Despite the announcement of the ceasefire – it’s called different things, pauses by others – shelling and intermittent clashes continue to be reported around Ras-al-Ain as of this morning, although the situation is reportedly calm elsewhere.”
4. Wide shot, podium with speakers
5. SOUNDbite (English) Tarik Jasarevic, spokesperson, World Health Organization (WHO):
   “Tal Tamr Hospital has been the main reception point for wounded persons coming from the conflict zone at Ras al Ain. The hospital has struggled to cope of the influx of patients and patients have been subsequently referred onwards to Al Hasakeh and Qamishli.”
6. Wide shot, TV camera and journalists
7. SOUNDbite (English) Hervé Verhoosel senior spokesperson, World Food Programme (WFP):
   “There are more than 165,000 people on the move in the north-east, and they seek shelter in Hasakeh and in Raqqa. Many people in those cities choose to stay with family and friends rather than in collective shelters, so that figure in fact can even be higher.”
8. Wide shot, journalists
9. SOUNDbite (English) Andrej Mahecic, spokesperson, UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR):
   “Another 734 refugees have entered Iraq last night. That is in addition to the 1,600 that we have moved to
Bardarash camp over the past four days.”

11. SOUNDBITE (English) Marixie Mercado, spokesperson, UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF):
“The Alouk water pumping station in Hassakeh is still non-functional due to the damage on the main power lines, affecting water supply to 400,000 people. Deconfliction is needed to allow UNICEF to supply 16,000 litres of fuel on a daily basis in order to run the back-up generators.”

13. SOUNDBITE (English) Andrej Mahecic, spokesperson, UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR):
“We haven’t seen any specific proposals from any party to these talks, so there nothing specific for us to comment about. You know our global position on the return of refugees that any return of refugees to Syria or any other place in the world has to be voluntary, it has to be dignified and it has to be safe at the time when it is safe to return.”
Shelling and clashes in northern Syria on the border with Turkey continue to cause hundreds of people to flee, the UN said today (18 Oct), despite a cessation of hostilities deal between Turkish forces and Syrian-backed Kurdish military.

Hailed as a ceasefire by some Governments and a five-day pause in hostilities by others, the agreement comes nine days into a military campaign launched by Turkey against Kurdish-held territory on its southern border, east of the Euphrates river.

“Despite the announcement of the ceasefire – it’s called different things, pauses by others – shelling and intermittent clashes continue to be reported around Ras-al-Ain as of this morning, although the situation is reportedly calm elsewhere,” said Jens Laerke from the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).

Updating journalists in Geneva, several UN agencies confirmed that they were continuing to deliver aid and provide basic services in the conflict zone “where access allows.”

Highlighting critical needs, the World Health Organization (WHO) appealed for the humanitarian response to be scaled-up urgently.

Spokesperson Tarik Jasarevic noted that 40 tonnes of medical supplies had been airlifted from Damascus to Qamishli earlier this week, while Ras al Ain and Tal Abyad hospitals remain closed.

This has made Tal Tamr Hospital “the main reception point for wounded persons coming from conflict at Ras al Ain”, he explained, before adding that it has “struggled to cope of the influx of patients and patients”, who have been sent to Al Hasakeh and Qamishli.

The WHO supplies – which include more than 100,000 treatments and 620 trauma kits – will be distributed to WHO-supported facilities in Al-Hasakeh, rural Ar-Raqqa and rural Deir-ez-Zor.

Meanwhile, the World Food Programme (WFP) announced on Friday that it plans reach 580,000 people in affected areas this month.

Since 9 October, the UN agency has provided assistance to 170,000 people, spokesperson Herve Verhoosel said, expressing concern at the mass displacement caused by the violence.

“There are more than 165,000 people on the move in the north-east, and they seek shelter in Al-Hassakeh and in Raqqa,” he said. “Many people in those cities choose to stay with family and friends rather than in collective shelters, so that figure in fact can even be higher.”

Lack of drinking water to hundreds of thousands of people is still a serious concern in Al-Hassakeh, UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF) said.

“The Alouk water pumping station in Hassakeh is still non-functional due to the damage on the main power lines, affecting water supply to 400,000 people,” said Marixie Mercado, spokesperson.

“Deconfliction is needed to allow UNICEF to supply 16,000 litres of fuel on a daily basis in order to run the back-up generators.”

Asked to comment on Turkey’s reported wish to send home nearly four million Syrian refugees who have been sheltering in the country for years, UNHCR’s Mr. Mahecic replied that it had not seen any proposals “from any party.”

Reiterating the agency’s stance on the return of refugees, he insisted that any return of refugees to Syria or
any other place in the world “has to be voluntary, it has to be dignified and it has to be safe at the time when it is safe to return.”