

A 'tragic life' for the displaced in Al-Hol camp

Author:

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AL-HOL CAMP: Malnourished children struck down by chronic diarrhea, mothers too weak to breastfeed – in northeastern Syria's Al-Hol camp, a humanitarian emergency is unfolding.

Arabic, French, German and English voices fill the air in the muddy alleyways, as foreign women who married into Daesh and civilians displaced by the fighting against terrorists seek out assistance.

But while much divides the two groups, one thing unites them; they despair over the camp's lack of food and medical care.

"It is a tragic life," said Najwa Ali Jolane, a young Syrian mother who has lived at Al-Hol for three and a half months.

"We lack everything," the 20-year-old said.

Flapping in the springtime breeze, white tents embossed with the UN refugee agency's acronym UNHCR stretch as far as the eye can see.

But the threadbare structures cannot cope with the flood of women and children who in recent months have fled a string of flattened villages in eastern Syria, including Baghouz, where Daesh's so-called caliphate was declared defeated on Saturday.

The most fortunate families in Al-Hol have their own tents, while the unlucky ones shelter with dozens of others in warehouses.

"There are 10,000 people living in large communal tents which lack privacy," said Paul Donohoe, from the International Rescue Committee.

An extra 5,000 tents are needed to house people, he said.

The flood of arrivals in Al-Hol has transformed the camp into a chaotic town.

It now brims with more than 70,000 people, but was only designed to accommodate a seventh of that number.

Kurdish authorities have raised the alarm and called on the international community to step up and help.

In front of a World Food Programme warehouse, huge lines of women – all dressed in the full black niqab – stand in the mud, awaiting rations that the UN agency says are enough for a month.

Some in the line refuse to speak to journalists, but others – Jolane included

– take the opportunity to rail against their misfortune.

“On days when it rains, our tent is flooded with water, so we have to move to a neighbors’ tents,” said the former resident of Hajjin, a village near Baghouz that was flattened by fighting in December.

Jolane’s son, just a few months old, is dressed in dusty and muddy clothes, his feet exposed.

WFP’s Syria spokesperson Marwa Awad acknowledges that “humanitarian conditions in Al-Hol camp are extremely critical.”

“What is lacking is proper space for the continuous influx of people as well as proper health facilities to treat injuries and diseases,” she said.

A Syrian woman, who did not want to give her name, said her three-year-old daughter “has been sick since she arrived here” around one month ago.

“She is vomiting and has persistent diarrhea,” she said angrily.

“We were brought here in uncovered vehicles. The children fell sick (and) many died on the way,” she added.

At least 140 people, mainly children, have died en route to Al-Hol or shortly after arriving since December, according to the IRC.

Cordoned off from the main camp and deemed a security threat, the foreign women who joined Daesh complain that their money and cell phones have been confiscated.

Many fear chronic diarrhea could weaken their children beyond the point of no return.

They told AFP they have been unable to get hold of Flagyl, a drug commonly used to treat persistent cases.

According to Save the Children, some 30 percent of children under the age of five screened at the camp since the start of February suffer acute malnutrition and WFP says it has tracked several cases of “dehydration and diarrhea.”

The future of the 9,000 women and children held in the foreigners’ section of Al-Hol is a constant headache for Kurdish authorities, who want to get rid of them, but Western capitals are reluctant or outright refuse to bring them home.

The foreign women are monitored closely and Kurdish guards escort them when they go to market in the main part of the camp.

“We cannot stay here, we have no food, no money,” said Romina Scheer, a young German woman.

“We want to go home.”

She said she traveled to Syria in December 2014 to join Daesh, where she married a fellow German Daesh member.

“I cannot breastfeed because I did not have enough to eat,” said Scheer.

Her children include a three-month-old baby boy and an eight-year-old daughter whose blonde pigtails and earring mark a stark contrast with her mother’s austere attire.

“My children – every day they ask: ‘Mummy when are we going to go home?’” said Scheer.

“And I say: ‘it depends on our country, (and) if they take us back.’”



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[Year of Gaza protests leaves lives](#)

broken, medical system on brink

Author:

Fri, 2019-03-29 20:42

GAZA CITY: A year ago, Ezzedine Al-Baz's decision to skip work and join tens of thousands at the first day of protests along the Gaza-Israel border nearly cost him his life.

Baz, then 29, said he had been standing a couple of hundred meters from the border fence for only about a half an hour when an Israeli sniper's bullet pierced his leg.

Five operations and multiple infections later, he is missing a chunk of bone, his leg remains strapped in a metal case and he will likely never walk as before.

"It has been a year that I have been suffering, there is still pain," he said from a clinic run by medical charity Doctors Without Borders (MSF) in Gaza City.

"At night I don't sleep at all. If I had known, I would have stayed at work."

A year after the start of protests and clashes on the Gaza-Israel border, more than 200 Palestinians have been killed by Israeli fire.

But beyond those killed, thousands of others wounded have been largely forgotten.

There have also been knock-on impacts for the Palestinian territory's already beleaguered health system. Hundreds of those shot remain at risk of infection and amputation, while Israel has turned down most applications to leave the strip for treatment.

So stretched are health care services that thousands of operations for other conditions have been delayed, while doctors who can leave are fleeing the strip, Gazan medics say.

With major protests expected on the anniversary Saturday, medical professionals are worried.

"A full-blown escalation would obviously push the system again toward the edge of collapse," said Gerald Rockenschaub, the World Health Organization (WHO) head in the Palestinian territories.

The protests labeled the Great March of Return have called for Palestinian refugees to be allowed to return to their former homes now inside Israel, which Israelis view as advocating for the destruction of the country. They were also billed as an opportunity for protesters to break the decade-long Israeli blockade of Gaza.

The World Bank says the restrictions are the primary cause of desperate

economic circumstances in the strip, where seven out of 10 young people are unemployed.

Early on, many protesters remained far back from the fence and demonstrated peacefully. Others approached and clashed with Israeli forces. Those approaching the fence have progressively become more violent.

Explosive devices, stones and fireworks have been used against Israeli forces. There has been occasional gunfire, with one soldier killed by a Palestinian sniper.

Israeli forces' use of live fire has come under heavy criticism, with Palestinians and rights groups saying protesters have been shot while posing little threat.

Last month, a UN probe said Israeli soldiers had intentionally fired on civilians in what could constitute war crimes.

At the MSF clinic, dozens of young men with casts sit on plastic chairs waiting for treatment.

The organization has treated more than 4,000 Palestinians with gunshot wounds. A few hundred are not healing and risk amputation.

Mohammed Bakr, a 27-year-old fisherman, was also shot on March 30 last year and has had six operations.

"Since that day I have had no hope for the future," he said.

He accused Israeli soldiers of shooting at protesters who did nothing to provoke them.

"I won't be able to work like before. The leg won't carry weight."

With Gaza's medical system overstretched, treatment outside the strip could ease pressure.

Around 500 applications have been made by those injured in the marches to cross the Israeli border for treatment, according to figures published by the WHO.

Less than one in five have received the permits in time.

COGAT, the Israeli body responsible for the permits, confirmed it granted around 100 requests.

"The Gaza health system suffers from long years of neglect by the Hamas terror organization, which prefers to invest its citizens' money in terror and military power," it said.

More than 8,000 operations for other often serious but not life-threatening conditions – such as gallstones or hip replacements – have been postponed in Gaza hospitals according to the WHO.

Dozens of doctors also left Gaza in 2018, a huge spike from previous years, health officials say.

Neither the WHO nor Gaza health authorities said they had exact figures.

WHO's Rockenschaub said he recently met a nurse who walked miles to work each day as she didn't have money for a bus.

"Whenever we talk to health authorities in Gaza, even to individual physicians, many of them talk about their intention to leave," he told AFP.



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UN urges Israel, Hamas to avoid violence on Gaza anniversary Egyptian cease-fire mediators shuttle between Israel, Gaza

[Brazil's Bolsonaro to walk diplomatic tightrope in Israel](#)

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Sat, 2019-03-30 01:19

BRASILIA: Brazil's President Jair Bolsonaro arrives in Israel Sunday, where he will walk a diplomatic tightrope as he seeks to shore up ties with his right-wing counterpart Benjamin Netanyahu while keeping key Arab trade partners onside.

Bolsonaro's controversial pledge to move Brazil's embassy to Jerusalem is expected to be high on the agenda during the three-day visit as Netanyahu uses the occasion to boost his standing ahead of April 9 elections.

The Brazilian ex-army captain's trip comes after his recent visits to the United States and Chile, as part of efforts to build ties with conservative governments around the world.

Neither Brazil nor Israel has released details of the visit, but Bolsonaro is expected to focus on correcting their lopsided trade relationship by boosting Brazilian exports, mainly soybeans and meat.

He is also expected to seek greater access to Israeli defense technology.

In 2018, Brazil's exports to Israel were worth \$321 million dollars, while imports, including fertilizers and chemical products, stood at \$1.17 billion, official data shows.

But the issue of relocating Brazil's embassy will likely dominate the visit, testing the tough-talking Bolsonaro's diplomatic skills.

Months after promising the shift, which sparked an angry response from Palestinian leaders, Bolsonaro has yet to announce a timetable.

Speaking to reporters Thursday, Bolsonaro suggested he was in no hurry to make a decision.

"Trump took nine months to decide, to give his final word, so that the embassy was transferred," Bolsonaro said.

"Perhaps now we will open a commercial office in Jerusalem."

While moving the embassy would please Bolsonaro's evangelical Christian support base, it would run the risk of provoking commercial retaliation from Arab states, some of which are major importers of Brazilian meat.

The issue has "a very important symbolic weight," said Paulo Kramer, a professor at the University of Brasilia.

"If he doesn't announce it on the trip, it will frustrate his voters' expectations and upset evangelical groups," federal lawmaker Marcos Pereira, who is also president of a parliamentary Brazil-Israel friendship group, told AFP.

The decision to move the embassy is highly sensitive because Israel claims all of Jerusalem as its capital, while Palestinians view east Jerusalem as the capital of their future state.

Virtually all countries agree that Jerusalem's status can only be defined through wider Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiations.

So far, only the United States and Guatemala have broken with that consensus by opening embassies in Jerusalem. Paraguay backtracked on a decision last year to move its embassy. Israel and the US have spoken with Honduras about its embassy going to Jerusalem.

"Moving the embassy of any country... is a violation of international law and an attack on the Palestinian people," the Palestinian envoy to Brazil, Ibrahim Alzeben, told AFP this week.

For Netanyahu, who faces a strong challenge from former military chief Benny Gantz in next month's election, Bolsonaro's visit will help him demonstrate that "he has friends around the world," Raphael Eldad, Israeli ambassador to Brazil from 2011 to 2014, told AFP.

"In the international context, Israel cannot ignore friends."



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Bolsonaro's Israel embassy move: high-risk mix of religion, politics
Trump buddies up with Bolsonaro, the 'Trump of the Tropics'

[UN Yemen envoy: Hodeidah troop redeployment slow but will happen](#)

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Thu, 2019-03-28 21:38

RIYADH: The UN envoy to Yemen said on Thursday the redeployment of rival factions in the key port city of Hodeidah is "slow" but will happen.

Martin Griffiths made the comments as Saudi Deputy Defense Minister Prince Khalid bin Salman discussed the Yemen cease-fire deal with US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo in Washington.

Prince Khalid and Pompeo "agreed on the need for parties to adhere to the agreement made in Sweden," the US State Department said. Pompeo expressed his appreciation for Saudi Arabia's continued support for Griffiths' efforts "to advance the political process in Yemen."

The deal between the Yemen government and Houthi militants was signed in the Swedish capital in December, and while leading to a reduction in hostilities in the city, it has since stalled.

Griffiths told The Associated Press that the cease-fire in the key port held seized by the militants near the start of the conflict is holding.

"As I've been reminded recently there are 50 percent fewer civilian casualties in Hodeidah since the cease-fire came into account than in the previous three months," Griffiths said. "So that's quite a change and that's good for the people of Hodeida, but we need to go further. We need to quickly see those redeployments happening."

Griffiths said the two sides are meeting daily to finalize details of the first redeployment from the Hodeidah port and two smaller ports. That will be followed by a second phase in which heavy weapons and ground forces will be removed from the city, he said.

Griffiths said if the first phase is successful, the ensuing demilitarization phase will be much easier. "Yes, it's slow, we shouldn't be surprised, but we need to keep the pressure up."

Griffiths told the Security Council last month that he is "optimistic" the cease-fire will hold and the redeployments will take place.

Hodeidah is the main entry point for aid to Yemen, where nearly four years of war has spawned the world's worst humanitarian crisis.

The war in Yemen started in 2014 when Houthi rebels swept the northern part of the country and forced the internationally recognized government to flee before seeking military intervention by an Arab coalition that includes Saudi Arabia.

Griffiths warned that the alternative to peace is "unthinkable" humanitarian disasters.

"It is the possibility of famine, the increasing cholera that we are now seeing, and a massive humanitarian aid program which barely keeps pace with the growing needs of the Yemeni people," he said. "We can't allow that to

replace peace in Yemen.”

Yemen is the world’s worst humanitarian crisis, with nearly two thirds of its people in need of some sort of aid and 3 million displaced. Thousands have died of malnutrition, preventable diseases and epidemics.





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Dozens of Houthis killed as battles rage in Yemen

[UAE official urges Arab openness to Israel – paper](#)

Thu, 2019-03-28 20:14

DUBAI: Relations between Arab states and Israel need to shift to help progress towards peace with the Palestinians, a senior United Arab Emirates official was quoted on Thursday as saying.

The decision by many Arab countries not to talk with Israel has complicated finding a solution over the decades, Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Anwar Gargash said, according to [Abu Dhabi-based daily The National](#).

"Many, many years ago, when there was an Arab decision not to have contact with Israel, that was a very, very wrong decision, looking back," Gargash said.

"Because clearly, you have to really dissect and divide between having a

political issue and keeping your lines of communication open.”



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