

Press Releases: Freedom of Movement for Internally Displaced Persons in Rukban

Press Statement
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The United States applauds the recent success of the United Nations and Syrian Arab Red Crescent (SARC) humanitarian convoy which brought life-saving humanitarian assistance to more than 40,000 displaced people at the Rukban informal camp in south-eastern Syria. The delivery, complete with careful distribution to all groups and UN/SARC monitoring, ensured that aid reached all those who needed it. We urge that access for humanitarian assistance must continue to Rukban and to all areas in Syria where people are in need.

The United States has long advocated and will continue to advocate for freedom of movement for internally displaced persons (IDPs). It has not impeded and will not impede the movement of any IDPs who wish to depart from the Rukban encampment. Nor will it force anyone to leave. The United States fully supports a process that is free from coercion and allows for safe, voluntary, and dignified departures for those wishing to leave Rukban.

Such a process must begin with sustained humanitarian access: departures under conditions of severe deprivation are inherently departures under duress. The United States has therefore called for many months for the Syrian regime to allow rapid, safe, and unhindered UN access to the Rukban encampment. The recent humanitarian convoy was a positive step, and we call upon Russia to help facilitate continued, regular humanitarian deliveries.

Any unilateral process to arrange departures that is not transparent or does not allow for informed decision-making by Rukban residents is not acceptable. A process of safe, voluntary, and dignified departures should be closely coordinated with the relevant UN agencies; it must ensure that IDPs have access to impartial information on their options, guarantees against arbitrary arrest and detention, a clear understanding of military conscription requirements, and information on conditions in their place of return.

During the recent humanitarian delivery, the UN conducted a survey of residents' needs and intentions – a crucial first step in planning a process of safe, voluntary, and dignified returns. The UN is analyzing this data, and we look forward to working with the UN and other partners to support safe, voluntary, and informed departures on the basis of this survey for those who choose to leave Rukban.

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