

URGENT ACTION

SYRIAN REFUGEES STILL STRANDED AT BORDER

The Jordanian government is still refusing to allow 13,000 Syrian refugees to leave the border area and move further into Jordan, including pregnant women, elderly people and children. Refugees are still stranded in a remote desert area on the border.

People fleeing armed conflict in Syria are still stranded, just inside Jordan, and their number has increased since November. Humanitarian organizations estimate that there are now at least 13,000 refugees stranded in the desert border area.

The Jordanian authorities have increased access to the border area for international organizations that are coordinating the distribution of ration cards for food, water, clothes and other essentials. However, refugees are being forced to wait up to three months before they can leave the border area, with some denied entry altogether. During this time they are exposed to extremely harsh weather conditions at the border.

In winter, typically from November to February, temperatures in the desert border zone can fall to freezing. Refugees stranded at the border are living in makeshift shelters which give them little protection from the extreme weather. Over 80 percent of them are vulnerable and include pregnant women, children (some of them unaccompanied), elderly people and people who are critically ill. People with chronic illnesses are struggling to get the medicines they need. Some pregnant women are in their third trimester and may be forced to give birth at the border.

The armed conflict in Syria intensified in 2015, and Lebanon and Turkey have effectively closed their borders to the majority of refugees from Syria. This is likely to have contributed to the increase in people trying to flee from different areas in Syria into Jordan through the north-eastern border.

Please write immediately in English or your own language:

- Calling on the Jordanian authorities to allow all Syrians stranded at the north-eastern border to immediately move further into Jordan;
- Urging Jordan to refrain from sending, either directly or indirectly, refugees and asylum-seekers back to Syria in violation of the international principle of *non-refoulement*;

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 4 MARCH 2016 TO:

Minister of Interior
Salameh Hammad
Ministry of Interior
PO Box 100
Amman
Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan
Fax: + 962 6 560 6908
Email: info@moi.gov.jo
Salutation: Your Excellency

Director of Syrian Refugees Affairs
Directorate
Major General Waddah M. c/o Rula
S.Sboul
Refugee Affairs Coordination Office
Ministry of Interior
PO Box 100
Amman, Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan
Fax: +962 65672411
Email: rula.sbool@moi.gov.jo
Salutation: Dear Major General

And copies to:
Minister of Foreign Affairs
His Excellency Nasser Judeh
Ministry of Foreign Affairs
P.O. Box 35217
Amman, Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan
Fax: +962 6 573 5163
Email: mofa@fm.gov.jo
Salutation: Your Excellency

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. Please insert local diplomatic addresses below:

Name Address 1 Address 2 Address 3 Fax Fax number Email Email address Salutation Salutation

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date. This is the first update of UA 280/15. Further information:

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde16/3059/2015/en/>

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

All asylum-seekers from Syria should be presumed to be in need of international protection, as the conflict in Syria includes widespread human rights violations, war crimes and crimes against humanity. Single men risk arrest or forced conscription if they are sent back to Syria. Closing the border to those in need of protection or indirectly forcing them to return to Syria by imposing intolerable living conditions on them is a violation of Jordan's obligations not to return people to a place where they would be at real risk of persecution or other serious human rights violations or abuses. This is known as the principle of *non-refoulement*.

Jordan hosts over 632,000 refugees from Syria and is one of five main host countries in the region which together host over four million refugees from Syria. Only 52% of Jordan's UN humanitarian funding requirements for 2015 have been met by the international community. In addition, only 160,664 resettlement places have been offered to Syria's most vulnerable refugees in the region, which is less than 2% of the total Syrian refugee population there.

Jordan has gradually restricted access to Syrians since 2012, and stopped keeping its borders open for Syrians fleeing conflict. The official border crossing between the Jordanian city of Ramtha and Dera'a in Syria was closed in 2012 and entry for certain categories of people, including Palestinians fleeing Syria, single men who cannot prove family ties to Jordan, and people without identity documents have been barred since then. In mid-2013 the western and eastern border crossings were also closed to Syrians, with a few exceptions made for the war-wounded and the most vulnerable by Jordan's own criteria, some of whom are treated and then sent back to Syria, in contravention of Jordan's customary international obligations. In May 2014 Jordan began stopping Syrians arriving at its international airport from entering unless they had a Jordanian residency permit or met a limited number of special exceptions. In July 2014 Jordan started severely restricting access through its north-eastern crossings, leaving many stranded at the Hadalat and Rukban crossings.

Jordan has not provided any official reason for closing its borders. In March 2015, at the Third International Pledging Conference for Syria, which aims to raise humanitarian funding for the UN's regional response to the Syria crisis, Jordan's prime minister said that the country's capacity to respond to Syria's refugees had been exceeded. Amnesty International recognizes the incredible strain that Jordan and other countries in the region are under and the urgent need for the international community to share more responsibility, but Jordan has a duty to protect refugees from Syria fleeing conflict and persecution and to allow them to enter the country.

Jordan has not ratified the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, or its Protocol of 1967. However under international customary law and other instruments, such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the Convention against Torture, Jordan is obliged not to return people to a place where they would be at real risk of persecution or other serious human rights violations or abuses. This is known as the principle of *non-refoulement* and prohibits the rejection of asylum-seekers at the border and the deportation of refugees.

Names: Syrian refugees
Gender m/f: both

Further information on UA: 280/15 Index: MDE 16/3292/2016 Issue Date: 22 January 2016