

# URGENT ACTION

## BORDER CLOSURE WORSENS REFUGEES' CONDITION

**Since the Jordanian government sealed its border with Syria on 21 June, around 80,000 refugees have been stranded in a desert area known as the 'berm', subjected to sand storms and searing heat. They are still not receiving essential and life-saving assistance.**

On 21 June, following a suicide attack at a military border post which killed seven and injured 13 Jordanian security personnel, the Jordanian government sealed its border with Syria, leaving over 80,000 refugees stranded in a desert area known as the 'berm'. Even before Jordan closed its border, humanitarian agencies were able to provide only basic services to the refugees at the berm. However, since the border closure humanitarian agencies have been prevented from reaching the refugees, over half of whom aid agencies believe to be children. Amnesty International is calling for all refugees to be immediately transferred to a safe place, either in Jordan or in a third country, where they can receive appropriate assistance and protection.

Since the 21 June border closure, only a limited provision of water is reaching the refugees at the berm. In contrast to the 15 litres per person, per day, determined by the World Health Organization (WHO) as necessary to meet basic survival water needs in an emergency, people at the Rukban border crossing situated along the berm receive only around 5-6 litres per person, per day. Aid agencies lifted food rations and hygiene kits over the border fence into the berm via cranes positioned inside Jordan on 4 August for the first time since the border closure. The aid drop was negotiated by aid agencies and the Jordanian Government, but the UN's World Food Programme (WFP) stated that the government made it clear it was a 'one-time' intervention. It is difficult to know whether this aid reached all those in need, given the challenges in monitoring its distribution.

The lack of sanitation, food and water is likely to have a negative impact on the already acute health conditions suffered by many of the refugees at the berm. Since the closure of the border, no medical services have been provided and no access to Jordan has been permitted even for the most serious of injuries. Aid workers have received credible reports of new born deaths; the death of at least nine women during child birth; children inflicted with bloody diarrhoea; jaundice and possible cases of hepatitis A and E, and gradual loss of eyesight.

### Please write immediately in Arabic, English, or your own language:

- Calling on the Jordan authorities to allow all refugees from Syria seeking refuge in Jordan immediate entry;
- Calling on the US to provide Jordan with the required technical and other support in order to facilitate the processing and safe transfer of refugees stranded at the berm to a safe place in Jordan or a third country. The US should also offer significant resettlement places for refugees in Jordan in order to demonstrate meaningful and tangible responsibility-sharing with Jordan.

### PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 28 SEPTEMBER 2016 TO:

The Honourable  
Salameh Hammad  
 Ministry of Interior  
 PO Box 100  
 Amman, Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan  
 Fax: + 962 6 560 6908  
 Email: info@moi.gov.jo

**Salutation: Dear Minister**

The Honourable  
John Kerry  
 U.S. Department of State  
 2201 C St. NW  
 Washington, DC 20520  
 USA  
**Salutation: Dear Secretary Kerry**

**And copies to:**  
Her Excellency  
Alice Wells  
 U.S. Embassy  
 Abdoun, Al-Umawyeen St.  
 Amman, Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan  
 Fax: + 962 6 592 0163

**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 second update of UA 280/15. Further information: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde16/3292/2016/en/>

**AMNESTY  
INTERNATIONAL**



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### ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Jordan has gradually restricted access to people from Syria since 2012. The official border crossing between Dera'a in Syria and the Jordanian city of Ramtha 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) has been barred since then. In mid-2013 the western and eastern border crossings were also closed to people from Syria, with a few exceptions made for the war-wounded and the "most vulnerable", based on criteria set by the Jordanian authorities. In May 2014 Jordan began stopping people from Syria arriving at its international airport from entering the country unless they had a Jordanian residency permit or met a limited number of special exceptions.

With most of the border closed, tens of thousands of refugees began to gather at Jordan's informal Rukban and Hadalat border crossings in a desert area known as the 'berm'. Since October 2015 a gradual build-up of people at the berm has led to over 71,000 people stranded at the Rukban border crossing, and around 7,000 people at the Hadalat border crossing. Due to security concerns, aid agencies were only allowed to distribute aid and provide health services to those at the berm from a designated service area. In March 2016, Jordan agreed to admit up to 20,000 refugees from the berm, who were transferred to Azraq camp for processing. On 21 June a suicide bomber in a truck laden with explosives went through an opening usually used for humanitarian deliveries, carrying out an attack which killed seven and injured 13 Jordanian security personnel. In response, King Abdullah stated that Jordan would handle terrorists 'with an iron fist', the border was sealed and aid agencies were effectively prevented from reaching the refugees stranded in the berm.

Jordan hosts over 657,000 refugees from Syria – 87 refugees per 1,000 inhabitants – and is one of five main host countries in the region, which together host over four and a half million refugees from Syria. While the arrival of a large number of refugees from Syria is putting a strain on Jordan's services and resources, wealthy countries have not shouldered their part of the responsibility for them. Only 45% of the total Inter-Agency humanitarian funding requirements for 2016 had been met by the international community by the end of June 2016. In 2015, only 62% of that year's Inter-Agency funding appeal was funded by the end of the year. In the first quarter of 2016, 12,889 refugees from Syria were submitted for resettlement from Jordan. However only 5,448 travelled to their country of resettlement.

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, and recognises that the Jordanian government has made efforts to allow some aid to reach the berm. However, Jordan has a duty to protect refugees from Syria fleeing conflict and persecution and to allow them to enter the country. Closing the border to those in need of protection and directly 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*.

All asylum-seekers from Syria should be presumed to be in need of international protection, as the conflict in Syria includes serious human rights violations, war crimes and crimes against humanity. In particular, single men risk arrest or forced conscription if they are sent back to Syria.

Name: Refugees from Syria  
Gender m/f: both

Further information on UA: 280/15 Index: MDE 16/4665/2016 Issue Date: 17 August 2016