



Statement

Urgent Distress Call on Behalf of Some 3,640 Families Whose Tents Were Damaged Due to the Rainstorm on Northwest Syria

On the evening of December 18, 2021, a heavy rainstorm, accompanied by freezing cold winds, hit northwest Syria, lasting for four days. The resulting flooding caused severe damage to hundreds of camps in the area, including ripping and severely damaging tents or completely destroying them and washing them away. This was accompanied by the loss or damage of internally displaced persons' (IDPs) remaining basic living necessities, such as clothes, sleeping and heating supplies, and foodstuffs.



Rainwater gathering in the Fuqaraa Lellah Camp, north of Idlib - December 19, 2021



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The continuous downpour led to the accumulation of floodwater turning the areas among the tents into an impassable muddy quagmire, impeding the delivery of essential daily aid supplies such as drinking water and food, as well as obstructing the IDPs' access to health services which depend on mobile clinics, with classrooms and clinics suspended, and muddy water leaking into some tents, damaging their contents; women, children and elderly people are the worst affected groups, since they are the most vulnerable among the IDPs, while evacuating pregnant women, persons with special needs, and the elderly suffering from chronic diseases, poses an additional challenge within the evacuation efforts to help those whose tents were submerged by the floodwaters or destroyed.

The Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR) has contacted many camp officials, as well as a number of relief organizations working in these camps, in particular, in Atama, Deir Hassan, Mash-had Rouhin, Kafr Yahmoul, Ma'aret Misreen, and Kelli, which were among the areas worst hit by the storm in Idlib; the worst affected camps were found among 36 compounds in Idlib governorate and the western suburbs of Aleppo governorate, with the camps in Idlib, with these sites constituting 86% of the affected camps, while the remaining 14% were in the western suburbs of Aleppo.

The Syrian Network for Human Rights team has worked over the past few days to assess the damage to the affected camps; we have documented damage to nearly 400 camps, and according to the number of tents in each of these, we found that there are at least 5,163 tents were partially or completely damaged. We estimate, therefore, that around 3,642 families have lost their remaining shelter for varying periods of time, depending on the extent of the damage to the tents, their contents, and the speed of the relief response.

We believe that a number of factors contributed to the increase in the percentage of affected camps, most notably:

- The sites where many of the camps were established are not conducive to resisting flooding, because the camps were established hurriedly, following the influx of tens of thousands of IDPs from cities such as Ma'aret al Numan and Khan Sheikhoun whose populations, numbering hundreds of thousands of people, were displaced. We noted during our assessment that some camps were established in low-lying areas or on loose slopes without vegetation where floodwaters have a more devastating effect.
- The massive number of camps in northwest Syria makes it difficult to find any suitable sites in higher, more suitable locations for establishing better camps, because most of these sites have already been occupied over the past decade.
- There's an absence of any sewage networks in many of the camps due to their relatively remote location far from residential areas, and the poor ground on which the campsites have been established which greatly increases the cost of constructing a sewage network.
- Flat-topped, non-ridge tents are more susceptible to damage, as their roofs effectively form ideal traps for collecting rainwater, which increases the chances of their collapse, as well as being less windproof than the usual ridge or dome tents. (This type of tent, which the IDPs used to call the ship tent, was designed for summer trips and is not suitable for housing IDPs for long periods, particularly when facing potentially severe weather conditions).



The Syrian Network for Human Rights calls on donor countries and Arab and international relief organizations to provide emergency grants to meet the needs of displaced families living in the open air in freezing winter conditions as soon as possible.

We also call on media to focus on the issue of forcibly displaced people affected by the recent rainstorms.

None of the millions of displaced people have been able to return to their homes, which may be only a few kilometers away, due to the Syrian regime forces' control over those areas, and the people's fully justified fear of being arrested, tortured, conscripted or 'disappeared'. The political transition process must be accelerated in accordance with Security Council Resolution No. 2254 to end the worsening crisis at its roots and ensure the displaced people's safe and dignified return to their homes.