

Evacuation of 4 Syria Towns Resumes After Deadly Bombing



Syrians, who were injured in a car bombing that targeted buses carrying evacuees from the besieged government-held towns, sit in a tent in Idlib Province on April 17, 2017.

DAMASCUS (Dispatches) – Evacuation of four areas in Syria has resumed days after the process, which is part of a deal between Damascus and terrorist groups, was interrupted by a bloody attack on a bus convoy carrying people from two villages in Idlib Province.

Some 45 buses carrying 3,000 civilians left the terrorist-besieged villages of al-Foua and Kefraya near the northwestern city of Idlib on Wednesday morning,

Syria's Central Military Media reported.

A convoy of 11 buses also moved armed men and their families from the town of al-Zabadani in Rif Dimashq Province.

Under the deal reached between the Syrian government and terrorists in late March, the residents of Foua and Kefraya will be taken to the outskirts of Aleppo City, while the terrorists and their families will be transferred from Zabadani and Madaya near Damascus

to terrorist-held territory.

The evacuation process kicked off on Friday following a brief delay, but it came to a halt a day later when a bomber blew up an explosive-laden car ripping through several buses carrying evacuees from the two villages.

The terrorist attack left at least 126 people, including 68 children, and injured dozens of others.

The UN says that a deadly attack on the bus convoy amounts to a war crime.

"We add our voice to the condemnation of the attack near Rashideen near western rural Aleppo Governorate that hit a convoy carrying people from the besieged Syrian villages of Kefraya and Foua to government-controlled areas, killing dozens of people. It is an attack which likely amounts to a war crime," said a spokesman for the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), Rupert Colville, on Tuesday.

"We reiterate the High Commissioner's call for accountability and the need to refer the situation in Syria to the International Criminal Court," he added.

Colville noted that the OHCHR has been informed that a number of the civilians injured in the attacks are still missing. "Some are believed to have been taken by armed opposition groups to opposition-controlled hospitals in Idlib Governorate... their families are concerned for their safety," he said.

Earlier in the day, the UN Security Council also condemned the attack as a "barbaric and cowardly" action, expressing sympathies and condolences to the victim's families.

In late March, the Syrian government and terrorist groups struck a deal that envisaged the transfer of 16,000 people from Foua and Kefraya in exchange for the evacuation of terrorists and their families from al-Zabadani and Madaya towns in the southwestern province of Rif Dimashq.

UN 'Closely Monitoring' Mass Hunger Strike in Zionist Regime's Jails



Palestinian protesters wave their national flag during a demonstration in the West Bank town of Bethlehem to show their support for inmates in the Zionist regime's jails on April 17, 2017.

WEST BANK (Dispatches) – The United Nations says it is keeping a close eye on the situation of more than a thousand Palestinian prisoners, who have gone on hunger strike honoring a call by a fellow inmate.

Unprecedented in scale, the protest action involves a reported number of 1,500 prisoners. It started on Monday to force the Zionist regime's prison authorities to provide more humane conditions for the inmates.

"We are obviously aware of the situation and following the developments closely," UN spokesman Stephane Dujarric said. He said "as a matter of principle, wherever it may be, we always call for prisoners to be treated in a humane way."

The protest leader, Marwan Barghouti, who has been given four life terms for allegedly masterminding anti-Zionist attacks, was placed in solitary confinement following the initiation of the strike.

The Israel Prisons Service spokesman Assaf Librati said Barghouti had been transferred from Hadarim Prison to the Kishon Prison, near Haifa.

The move came after he published an opinion piece in The New York Times on the hunger strike.

The Zionist regime's authorities have ruled out negotiating with the striking Palestinian prisoners.

Public Security Minister Gilad Erdan said the hunger strikers

"are terrorists and incarcerated murderers who are getting what they deserve and we have no reason to negotiate with them."

Palestinians have rallied in the occupied West Bank in support of the hunger strikers. The protests led to clashes with Zionist troops.

The UN official further said the world body takes cognizance of the confrontations and added, "We call on all parties to exercise maximum restraint."

In The New York Times opinion piece, Barghouti vowed that Palestinians would not surrender in the face of the occupying regime's "inhumane" occupation.

"Decades of experience have proved that Israel's inhumane system of colonial and military occupation aims to break the spirit of prisoners and the nation to which they belong, by inflicting suffering on their bodies, separating them from their families and communities, using humiliating measures to compel subjugation," Barghouti wrote. "In spite of such treatment, we will not surrender to it."

In a show of solidarity with their loved ones, the families and relatives of the protesting inmates launched a hunger strike in the West Bank on Tuesday, the Palestinian Ma'an news agency reported.

They have erected a "solidarity tent" in the city of Salbit.

Ayman Muhammad Bani Nimra, the mother of an imprisoned Palestinian, told Ma'an that she had started refusing food and "would not stop unless our children in the occupation's prisons end their hunger strike and receive improvements in the conditions of their detentions."

Rimah Shawkat al-Khuffash, whose brother Haitham is also among the hunger strikers, urged all Palestinian citizens to support them, adding that she was also refusing to eat in solidarity with the prisoners.

The regime's prisons hold around 6,500 Palestinians, including 300 minors. Some of the inmates are held under Tel Aviv's policy of administrative detention, which enables confinement without charge.

More Camps Needed for Those Fleeing Daesh in Iraq's Mosul

BAGHDAD (Press TV) – An Iraqi official says that more camps are required to accommodate the flow of people fleeing Daesh in west Mosul.

"Food is available and medical services are being offered by the organizations, but what we really need is more camps. We call for a quick opening of the new camps currently under construction in Salamiya, Bartella and other areas to accommodate more people," said Iraqi Army Brigadier General Jabbar Hassona.

According to the United Nations, nearly half a million civilians had fled the area since the offensive to retake Mosul from Daesh terrorists started on October 17, 2016.

Hassona added that the flow of displaced persons goes up and down in accordance with the military operations in the city. "(It is) going up and down in accordance with the military operation and advancement made by our troops and the opening of safe passages for them," he said.

A high-ranking Iraqi military figure says Daesh terrorists are only in control of six neighborhoods in the western part of Mosul as government forces, backed by volunteer fighters from Popular Mobilization Units, are battling to expel the extremists out of the country's second largest city.

The commander of the Counter-Terrorism Service (CTS), Lieutenant General Talib Shaghathi, said on

Tuesday that military forces continue to gain ground against Daesh terrorists, and are steadily liberating the remaining terrorist-held areas in western Mosul, Arabic-language and official al-Sabaah (The Morning) daily newspaper reported.

Shaghathi added that Iraqi forces and their allies have already purged the Takfiri from 32 districts out of the total 38 in addition to the strategic Mosul International Airport and Ghazlani military base.

Meanwhile, the UN has warned that the civilian situation in west Mosul could become the worst during the entire conflict.

"If there is a siege and hundreds of thousands of people don't have water

and don't have food, they will be at enormous risk," said Lisa Grande, the deputy special representative of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI). "We could be facing a humanitarian catastrophe, perhaps the worst in the entire conflict," she added.

Iraqi army soldiers and pro-government fighters from Popular Mobilization Units, commonly known by the Arabic word Hashd al-Sha'abi, have made sweeping gains against the terrorists since launching the operation to retake Mosul.

The Iraqi forces took control of eastern Mosul in January after 100 days of fighting, and launched the battle in the west on February 19.

Pentagon Chief Claims:

U.S. Seeks Political Solution to Yemen Conflict

WASHINGTON (Press TV) – U.S. Defense Secretary James Mattis says the conflict in Yemen needs to be resolved "as quickly as possible" through UN-brokered peace negotiations.

"Our aim is that this crisis can be handed to a team of negotiators under the aegis of the United Nations that can try to find a political solution as quickly as possible," Mattis told reporters as he flew to Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.

"We will work with our allies, with our partners to try to get it to the UN-brokered negotiating table," the Pentagon chief said.

Mattis is expected to meet senior

Saudi officials, including King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud and Deputy Crown Prince and Defense Minister Mohammed bin Salman.

Several UN brokered ceasefires and talks have so far failed to end the conflict in Yemen.

Mattis gave no details on what additional support, if any, the United States would provide to the Saudi-led coalition. Washington already provides intelligence as well as aerial refueling to coalition warplanes carrying out air strikes in Yemen.

Human rights groups have repeatedly criticized the Saudi-led bombing campaign in Yemen for

causing civilian casualties. The campaign has claimed the lives of more than 12,000 people, most of them civilians.

Saudi Arabia launched its deadly campaign against Yemen in March 2015 with the alleged goal of pushing back the Houthis Ansarullah movement from the capital, Sana'a, and to reinstate the regime of Yemen's former president, Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi, who is a staunch ally of Riyadh.

The Saudis and their allies have also suffered considerable casualties in the operation on Yemen as official estimates say

more than 500 soldiers from Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Bahrain have been killed since March 2015.

Some officials in U.S. President Donald Trump's administration have called for more American military support for the Saudi-led coalition.

In late January, U.S. special forces carried out an attack against a purported position of al-Qaeda terrorists in the central Yemeni province of Bayda, killing about 30 civilians.

The raid, in which just about everything went wrong, was the first known American-led ground mission in Yemen since December

2014.

The White House hailed the operation as a success, but critics said it was a failure since it resulted in the death of civilians and 36-year-old Navy SEAL Ryan Owens.

The U.S. military carried out a flurry of air strikes in Yemen after the botched raid, involving a mix of manned and unmanned aircraft.

Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) has taken advantage of the chaos and breakdown of security in Yemen to tighten its grip on the southern and southeastern parts of the Arab country.