

STARVING, DISPLACED CIVILIANS: ONGOING TRAGEDY OF WAR IN SYRIA



The iconic photo above, provided by the UN and showing hungry refugees in Yarmouk Camp lining up to receive food, has helped to raise awareness of the plight of millions of displaced civilians from Syria who are now facing a fourth year of war. Despite the spate of publicity over the photo (and plans for even more exposure, see below), the UN is now warning that with the world's focus possibly shifting to the Crimean situation, these starving refugees are at risk of being forgotten again:

The head of the United Nation's refugee agency said on Tuesday it must be ready in case Ukraine's crisis causes refugees to flee Crimea, but his biggest worry is that "a total disaster" could occur if the international community diverts its attention away from Syria's conflict.

Antonio Guterres, the head of the U.N.'s High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), said in an interview that little progress was being made in efforts by

the United States and Russia, now at loggerheads over Ukraine, to bring Syria's warring sides together after the collapse of talks in Geneva last month.

/snip/

With the Syrian conflict now heading toward a fourth year this week and more people fleeing the war, the UN has warned that Syrians are about to replace Afghans as the world's largest refugee population.

There are currently more than 2.5 million Syrian registered by the U.N. in neighboring countries such as Lebanon, Turkey, Jordan and Iraq, but Guterres said it is believed more than 3 million have fled the conflict.

"It is absolutely essential that the international community mobilizes massively to support Lebanon, to support Jordan, to support all the other neighboring countries to make sure that they are able to cope with the challenge and to preserve the stability of the region," he said.

The photo was taken in the Yarmouk refugee camp. From the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA):

Our spokesperson Chris Gunness has the following to say on the situation in Yarmouk Camp

"UNRWA has received credible reports that clashes and shelling intensified in Yarmouk during the night of 9 March and continued throughout the day of 11 March. Ongoing hostilities have now prevented UNRWA from distributing humanitarian assistance in Yarmouk for eleven consecutive days.

UNRWA remains deeply concerned about the desperate humanitarian situation in

Yarmouk and the fact that repeated resort to armed force has, over the previous eleven days, disrupted its efforts to alleviate the desperate plight of civilians. UNRWA reiterates its strong demands that all parties cease hostilities and seek to resolve their differences exclusively by peaceful means. UNRWA also urges all concerned parties to immediately allow and facilitate the resumption of food distribution to civilians inside Yarmouk."

Think about that. The very site where this photo was taken has been shelled as recently as yesterday and no food supplies have reached the camp in eleven days. Sadly, even the photo itself has been subject to attack, with the New York Times today providing information from photography experts confirming its authenticity:

Digital photography experts said they believed that the image was real.

Hany Farid, a computer science professor at Dartmouth College who specializes in image forensics, said a relatively simple "clone test" – an examination to reveal whether individuals in the crowd looked alike and would thus be evidence of alteration – showed no such duplications.

He also said the consistency of light and shadow in the photograph would have been enormously difficult to fabricate. More persuasive, he said, was a video of the Yarmouk camp shot at the same time that corroborated the scene.

"There is no evidence that photo is fake," Mr. Farid said in a telephone interview. "So now everybody should shut up about it."

Here is the video Farid mentions, and the

opening scenes do indeed match the photo in location and crowd size. Further, we get multiple vantage points in the video, making it quite clear the crowd was real:

[youtuber
youtube='http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h-rjJCRf
hk8#t=188']

UNRWA is carrying out a huge public awareness campaign to aid those who are starving in Syria:

The global humanitarian community has released a joint “Thunderclap” statement demanding “immediate, secure, substantial and permanent humanitarian access for all civilians in Syria, including countless children. The statement, which comes a week after the UN was last able to deliver food to Yarmouk camp in Damascus, is signed by 130 organisations, including major United Nations agencies and International Non Governmental organizations along with smaller, grassroots groups with deep reach into local communities.

The statement urges “all parties on the ground to listen to the voice of the international community as expressed unanimously through the Security Council and to act now to halt the march of death, injury, hunger and suffering.” It makes a call to world leaders on the third anniversary of the start of the conflict; “Don’t let the people in Syria, children and families, lose another year to bloodshed and suffering, violating the most fundamental laws of war.”

Explaining the campaign, UNRWA Spokesperson, Chris Gunness said, “This is part of a Thunderclap social media campaign which aims to reach 23 million people with the hashtag “LetUsThrough. The “Thunderclap” itself will be at noon

Yarmouk time on 18th March, when a tweet with our campaign hashtag will be released to millions of people who will have signed up for the campaign. Anyone can join the campaign, individuals and organizations. Once we reach 23 million, the iconic campaign image (attached) of thousands of civilians waiting for food in Yarmouk Camp will appear on the world famous electronic billboard in New York's Times Square, sending a powerful signal to the global diplomatic community in UN Headquarters nearby."

Gunness added, " We will then photograph the image in Times Square and tweet it back to the 23 million who supported the campaign, including the people of Syria. So it is a campaign bringing together humanitarians all round the world, sending a powerful diplomatic message but also sending a signal of solidarity with all civilians in Syria, who have suffered enough because of this pitiless conflict. We also hope that diplomats at the UN and members of the public will take "selfies" with the image as a backdrop and send them round the world as an act of solidarity."

The Thunderclap campaign can be joined [here](#).