

Biggest ever UN aid delivery in Syria provides relief to desperate civilians

The biggest UN humanitarian convoy yet to operate inside Syria has successfully distributed aid to 40,000 desperate people in a hard-to-access desert camp near the country's southern border with Jordan, the Organization announced on Friday.

Jens Laerke from the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs ([OCHA](#)), highlighted that Thursday's delivery to Rukban was only the second time the UN has been able to reach the remote site from within Syria, where at least eight children had recently died, and some women have had to resort to "survival sex" just to stay alive.

"It was a complex, large-scale aid operation, it's the biggest ever carried out by the United Nations in Syria," he said, adding that it was carried out with UN partner the Syrian Arab Red Crescent ([SARC](#)).

"The mission lasted nine days, it consisted of 133 trucks in total, 118 loaded with relief supplies and 15 carrying logistics support," he said. "With more than 300 staff, volunteers and commercial suppliers that took part. It took more than two months of advocacy and negotiations with all parties to ensure safe access."

One of Syria's most challenging places to reach

Rukban is around 300 kilometres from the capital Damascus and one of the last remaining remote and hard to reach locations, in dire need of regular aid from the UN and partners.

Some women are subjected to serial marriages and some told us they had turned to survival sex as a last resort, *UNHCR's Andrej Mahecic*

Supply routes are often blocked and the majority of people at the site are displaced women and children who have been living there for years in harsh conditions, according to the [World Food Programme](#) ([WFP](#)).

Spokesperson Hervé Verhoosel said in a statement that amid significant poverty and a lack of basic goods, many families lack firewood and "end up collecting garbage and plastic to make a fire to cook and keep warm".

Children 'walk barefoot in puddles'

Prices of the limited food and non-food items "are exponentially high", the UN food agency added, and commodities have to be smuggled into the market – a drastic situation underlined by the UN refugee agency ([UNHCR](#)), which described children "walking around barefoot through puddles and mud, in cold

and the rain. The winter months has obviously been hard on these people and there also fatalities among the youngest”.

Spokesperson Andrej Mahecic added that in order to survive, early marriages were also “common” for girls.

“Some women are subjected to serial marriages and some told us they had turned to survival sex as a last resort,” Mr. Mahecic explained, noting also that many women were “essentially terrified to leave their mud huts or tents and to be outside, as there are serious risks of sexual violence, sexual abuse and harassment”.

Newborns at mortal risk amid freezing temperatures

The [UN Children’s Fund \(UNICEF\)](#) also highlighted the deadly cost of a lack of basic medical care in Rukban.

“There are no certified doctors and only a few poorly supplied clinics,” said spokesperson Christophe Boulhierac. “Since December last year, at least eight children – most of them newborns – died in the camp because of freezing temperatures and lack of medical care.”

According to UNICEF, 30 of the convoy’s 118 trucks were loaded with the agency’s life-saving supplies for children.

This included health and nutrition supplies for around 20,000 children and mothers, hygiene kits for more than 40,000 people, recreational kits, school books, stationery and school bags for more than 8,000 children.

After almost eight years of war in Syria, hundreds of thousands of people have been killed and millions have been displaced inside and outside the country.

UN will play post-war role in reconstruction, says UN Envoy

Basic infrastructure has also been destroyed and will need to be rebuilt before Syrians can go home – an issue that the United Nations would “definitely contribute to”, depending “of course on the donor community to be able to move forward”, [UN Special Envoy for Syria](#), Geir Pedersen, told journalists in Geneva.

“Obviously for Syria to come out of the crisis we need a comprehensive approach,” he said. “And obviously that approach should lead to the IDPs (internally displaced people) being able to return to their homes, the refugees being able to return to their homes, but of course there are certain requirements for that to happen and the voluntary return of refugees, will be important for the future of Syria. And hopefully then we can have a political process that will enable this to happen.”

Asked about the likelihood of a meeting of the Constitutional Committee in the Swiss city, in line with UN Security Council resolution 2254 and its call for a genuine, credible and inclusive process to end the conflict, Mr.

Pedersen said that his hope that it would meet “as soon as possible”.

Once finalized, the Constitutional Committee will comprise three groups: the Government of Syria, a broad opposition delegation; and one comprising Syrian experts, civil society, independents, tribal leaders and women.

Mr. Pedersen added: “We have had good discussions with the relevant parties, I think we had identified the challenges and we have agreed on how we should move forward and that I see as a very positive sign.”