

UN refugee agency urges sustained access as civilians flee Raqqa fighting

16 June 2017 – As fighting in and around the Syrian city of Raqqa continues to take a toll on civilians and displaces thousands every day, the United Nations refugee agency has called for greater and sustained access to that it can reach those in desperate need of humanitarian assistance.

According to the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees ([UNHCR](#)) overland access to more than 430,000 estimated to be in need across the larger Raqqa governorate remains either cut off or extremely difficult, resulting in need airlift supplies – a costly and complex undertaking.

With partners [we continue to explore all possible supply routes](#) and are working with the authorities to secure greater access to those in need, Andrej Mahecic, a spokesperson for the UN agency said earlier this week.

However, the situation on the ground is complicated by the number of locations where those fleeing the fighting are taking shelter and the sheer number of new displacements. Last month alone, at least 100,000 people left their homes in search of safety.

Many have been displaced more than once, and tens of thousands are passing through camps or transit sites and quickly moving on to other areas or returning to their places of origin.

According to Mr. Mahecic, levels of humanitarian access vary for security and logistical reasons.

For example, UNCHR has been able to have regular access to the Mabrouka camp in Hassakeh, where approximately 1,700 people have taken shelter. But the situation is at the Ein Issa camp is much worse.

Located to the north of Raqqa City and housing about 9,000 people, Ein Issa is over five hours by road from UNHCR's office in Qamishli – where the agency's Raqqa response is coordinated from and where the supplies are brought in by air – and access remains extremely challenging.

Needs in other areas where significant numbers of those displaced are residing is being assessed, noted the UNHCR spokesperson.

In the coming days and weeks, UNHCR along with our partners will continue to provide help for those in need and to step up our response where access and security conditions allow, he added.

A conflict zone with mines and unexploded ordnance common

On top of access challenges, humanitarian agencies also have to contend with

extremely hazardous conditions as a result of conflict and dangers such as mines and unexploded ordnance.

Resources are also badly-needed.

“Funding is not keeping up with needs on the ground,” said the UNHCR spokesperson, noting that the agency urgently requires \$37 million to continue to respond to fresh displacement.

The inter-agency Raqqa response plan which includes UNHCR and other UN agencies, also remains severely underfunded, having received only \$29 million (less than 20 per cent) of the \$153 million needed.

“It is vital to have access, resources and security to continue responding to this latest wave of displacement and suffering to hit already beleaguered and terrified civilians,” underscored Mr. Mahecic.