

## Statement of Concern – Situation in northwest Syria

As violence continues to escalate in northwest Syria, 10 Canadian aid agencies are warning that the number of people displaced could reach one million by next week unless immediate action is taken.

In the past five days alone, 142,000 people have fled their homes, bringing the total number of people displaced—most of them women and children—to over 800,000 since December.<sup>1</sup> This is the single largest displacement of people in such a short period since the conflict started in Syria in 2011.

Canada's leading aid agencies are calling on the Government of Canada to exercise available diplomatic channels to encourage parties to reach and respect a ceasefire, refrain from using explosive weapons in populated areas, uphold humanitarian law and secure humanitarian access, to ensure displaced populations are able to access vital aid.

The humanitarian situation is dire. According to UNICEF, more than 6,500 children have been forced to flee their homes every day over the last week.<sup>2</sup> In addition to the increased violence in recent weeks, 2.8 million residents in northwest Syria are already in need of some kind of humanitarian assistance.

Most of the people displaced in northwest Syria have been displaced multiple times before, with each new displacement introducing new risks, exhausting coping mechanism, and intensifying existing vulnerabilities, like mental health issues.

The brutal winter weather is making this situation increasingly urgent. People fleeing do not possess adequate clothing and supplies to protect themselves. Displacement camps reportedly do not have the capacity to host any new arrivals and require both access for humanitarian actors and increased resources.

Women and girls are particularly vulnerable as the lack of shelter options and the sub-standard living conditions in areas of displacement places them at increased risk of sexual and gender-based violence. With people settling in overcrowded and unsafe areas, needs related to shelter, protection, food, water, hygiene and health are urgent priorities.

In addition to civilians themselves, civilian infrastructure is also under attack, including Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camps, schools, health centres and hospitals being heavily impacted. The UN Security Council must continue to emphasize the need for restraint and the importance of protecting civilians and facilitating uninterrupted humanitarian access.

The international community must condemn this ongoing violence and commit to holding those responsible for violating International Humanitarian Law to account. After nine long years of suffering for Syrian civilians, a peaceful solution to this conflict is urgently needed. **We call on the Government of Canada to condemn the violence in northwest Syria and help ensure a ceasefire.**

Signed by:

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<sup>1</sup> <https://reliefweb.int/report/syrian-arab-republic/recent-developments-northwest-syria-situation-report-no-8-13-february>

<sup>2</sup> UNICEF - <https://www.cnn.com/2020/02/02/world/syria-idlib-children/index.html>



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