



Right Hon William Hague MP
Foreign Secretary
Foreign and Commonwealth Office
King Charles Street
City of Westminster SW1A 2AH

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For the attention of: Right Hon William Hague MP

17 January 2014

Dear Mr. Hague,

Re: Yarmouk refugee camp, Syria

As lawyers committed to the protection and promotion of Palestinian human rights, we urge the British government to take all necessary diplomatic measures to ensure that Syrian authorities and other parties immediately allow humanitarian access to assist civilians trapped inside the Palestinian refugee camp of Yarmouk, and to ensure that all parties engaged in the conflict adhere to their binding legal obligations under international humanitarian law and international human rights law.

The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA) report covering the period 17 December 2013 to 6 January 2014 states that conflict is increasingly encroaching on UNRWA camps and the unofficial Palestinian refugee camp, Yarmouk, with shelling and violent clashes continuing to take place in and nearby them. These camps are residential areas and home to thousands of civilians. A reported but unconfirmed figure of 50 Palestinian refugees were killed in the last three weeks: 23 in Yarmouk, 15 in Dera'a, 6 in Khan Eshieh, 2 each in Sbeineh and Qabr Essit and 1 each in Ein el Tal and Homs. UNRWA reports this is a rapid increase on previous reporting periods.

We are gravely concerned about the situation of the estimated 18,000 residents that remain in Yarmouk. UNRWA reports that all access points to Yarmouk remain sealed off by Syrian government security forces and that malnutrition is widespread which, along with lack of health care, is contributing to a rising number of further deaths not caused directly by violence. UNRWA further reports that residents of Yarmouk are extremely vulnerable with limited or no flight options. We consider these circumstances give rise to a substantial concern that the Palestinian population in Yarmouk is being subjected to widespread, systematic and gross human rights violations by Syrian security forces, which may amount to crimes against humanity.

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We therefore urge the British government to take all necessary steps to ensure that Syrian authorities and other parties urgently allow and facilitate safe and open humanitarian access to Yarmouk to assist civilians trapped there, and that all parties to the conflict immediately and unconditionally fulfil their binding legal obligations for the protection of all civilians in Syria. Such action should include working unilaterally and together with other governments to convene a special session of the United Nations Human Rights Council at which states can make clear that all alleged gross human rights violations will be subject to full international investigations and that universal jurisdiction will be exercised wherever appropriate, and to convene an urgent meeting of the United Nations Security Council for the purpose of referring the situation in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011 to the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court.

Yours sincerely,

Tareq Shourouh
Director, Lawyers for Palestinian Human Rights