

An estimated 3,000 children trapped and running out of food and medicine as new area comes under siege in Syria

Friday, May 13, 2016...Toronto...A complete siege has been imposed on the Khan Eshieh area in Syria in recent days, blocking essential supplies from entering and risking the lives of an estimated 3,000 children trapped inside, according to a local aid group there.

The last remaining road in and out of Khan Eshieh, a Palestinian refugee camp near Damascus, was shut this week by heavy shelling and snipers, according to the Jafra Foundation, which provides education, psychosocial support and other aid in the camp. On one recent evening, three youths were reportedly shot dead while trying to escape. Shelling and bombing has intensified, with dozens of barrel bombs falling on the area.

Sonia Khush, head of Save the Children's Syria programme, said: "Despite the supposed ceasefire across the country, people are living in terror of siege and bombardment. People in Khan Eshieh tell us that most medicine, fuel and flour has almost run out, and food prices have doubled in the past few days. They expect it to get even worse in the coming days. The roads and access to the camp must urgently be reopened and vital humanitarian aid immediately allowed in."

There are an estimated 12,000 people – about a quarter of them children – in Khan Eshieh. The camp has been partially besieged for nearly three years, with all the main roads between the camp and Damascus closed since 2013 and military checkpoints around the camp to prevent people from entering and leaving. Civilians were able to use one road – known locally as 'the Death Road' due to the high risk of travelling on it – to get food, medicine and supplies from the nearby town of Zakia. However, in recent weeks medicine has been prevented from entering Zakia and the road has now been shut off by heavy shelling and sniper fire.

Only one doctor and one dentist are believed to remain in the camp, and do not have enough medicine, equipment and electricity needed to treat patients. Residents report an urgent need for water purification tablets to reduce the growing risk of disease.

Despite the recent February agreement to increase humanitarian access to besieged areas of Syria, hundreds of thousands of families are still without aid. Only 17% of the more than 4.5 million people in besieged and hard-to-reach areas have so far received assistance, and UN aid convoys continue to be denied permission. At least six besieged areas have still not received any aid at all.

The situation in Yarmouk, another Palestinian refugee camp near Damascus, is continuously alarming, after weeks of fighting in the area. A new checkpoint in the camp is preventing families from accessing food and water, and much of the water supply is now contaminated. The main hospital, Palestine Hospital, reports that it has run out of fuel to operate with and medical supplies are still being prevented from entering the camp.

- Save the Children works with Syrian partners in besieged and other hard to reach areas in Syria to provide food parcels, support schools, repair water systems and provide psychological support for children affected by bombing and siege.

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