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Situation of the Yarmouk refugee camp in Syria

Greens/EFA motion for resolution

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The European Parliament,

- having regard to its previous resolutions on Syria, in particular the one of 11 February 2015 on the humanitarian crisis in Iraq and Syria, in particular in the IS context,
- having regard to the statement by the Vice President and High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Federica Mogherini and the Commissioner for Humanitarian Aid and Crisis Management Christos Stylianides of 10 April 2015, on the situation in Yarmouk, Syria; having regard to the declaration by the High Representative on 18 April 2015, on the situation in the Yarmouk Palestinian refugee camp in Syria,
- having regard to United Nations Security Council resolutions 2139, 2165 and 2191,
- having regard to the Yarmouk Situation reports by UNRWA,
- having regard to the UN Security Council press statement on Yarmouk Refugee Camp, of 21 April 2015
- having regard to Rule 135 of its Rules of Procedure,

A. Whereas the conflict in Syria has led to a humanitarian catastrophe of an unprecedented scale, with more than 200.000 people killed, including mostly civilians, and more than 7.6 million people internally displaced and 3.5 million refugees, first and foremost as a result of the onslaught of the Assad regime against its own population over the past five years;

B. Whereas the Palestinian refugee camp of Yarmouk was established in 1957 in a bustling southern

suburb of Damascus; whereas before the Syrian conflict, Yarmouk was home to some 160,000 inhabitants, mostly Palestinian refugees and some Syrians; whereas most of these refugees originated in the northern part of Mandatory Palestine and were expelled from their homes in 1948; whereas international organisations estimate the current population of Yarmouk at 18,000, including 3,500 children;

C. Whereas since 26 December 2012, the Palestinian refugee camp of Yarmouk in Damascus has been under siege by the Assad regime following warplane bombings of a school and a mosque the day before; Whereas the Syrian army has prevented the entry of all people, and all food and goods, including medical supplies, into Yarmouk since July 2013, with only intermittent access in January 2014;

D. Whereas attacks by Assad's regime, including aerial bombing and tank or artillery shelling, have been indiscriminate, carried out with gross disregard for the civilian population, while others appear to have deliberately targeted civilian objects, such as hospitals and medical centres, onwards since December 2012; whereas shelling and bombing on civilian areas constitute a war crime;

E. Whereas in the context of the siege, Syrian security forces have arrested scores of Yarmouk residents, many of whom have been subjected to enforced disappearance and dying in custody in suspicious circumstances; whereas those arrested by the Syrian regime include medical workers, whose enforced disappearance and in many cases death, including by torture in the custody of Syrian security forces, has been documented;

F. Whereas Syrian government forces arrested 27 residents of Yarmouk and took them to the Palestine Branch of Military Intelligence in Damascus and their fate remains unknown, since the month of the opening of the camp in January 2014; whereas they were arrested during an officially authorized food and aid distribution at the Syrian army checkpoint and were among those who went to collect food parcels for residents;

G. Whereas on 1 April 2015, the so-called Islamic State (IS), launched an attack on Yarmouk to reinforce its ally Jabhat Al Nusra against anti-Assad armed opposition groups batallion Aknaf Beyt el Makdis, seizing control of up to 60% of the camp; whereas the Assad regime continued the shelling and aerial bombardment of the camp in response to the IS attack and intensive street battles between anti-Assad armed opposition groups Aknaf Beyt el Makdis and IS and Al Nusra occurred throughout the camp; whereas on 16 April 2015, IS fighters were reported to have withdrawn from most of Yarmouk in coordination with Jabhat al-Nusra, which previously held control of most of the camp together with Palestinian and other Syrian factions ; whereas the current situation is rapidly evolving with regular movements from IS and other armed groups in and around this neighbourhood of Damascus, including inside the camp;

H. Whereas on 1 April 2015, indiscriminate attacks by Syrian security forces killed civilians such as medical personnel in addition to two IS fighters; whereas on 4 April 2015 the Syrian military dropped barrel bombs on numerous streets in Yarmouk resulting in heavy civilian casualties;

I. Whereas the April outburst of violence has further aggravated the dramatic humanitarian situation, which was already at an unprecedented level of starvation and severe shortages in basic food, water and medical supplies; whereas heating and electricity have been suspended for over 2 years in the camp and

water since September 2014; whereas nearly 200 people are believed to have died in Yarmouk in 2014 as a result of hunger; whereas an unconfirmed number of Palestinians and Syrians have fled the besieged camp to adjoining neighbourhoods; whereas UNRWA has not been able to complete a successful distribution in Yarmouk since 6 December 2014;

J. Whereas Palestinian human rights defender Mr Abdullah Al Khateeb, a founding member of the Palestinian League for Human Rights (PLHR), a network documenting human rights of Palestinian refugees, has received threats upon his life; whereas members of the IS militias sought to capture him on 1st April; whereas on 23 February 2015, Mr Firas Al Naji, a member of the PLHR was shot dead by other groups in his residence in the camp; Whereas Mr Yehia Hourani, a Red Crescent activist, was also killed on 30 March in the camp;

K. whereas the 480,000 Palestinian refugees in Syria constitute a particularly vulnerable group in the conflict; whereas they are scattered in over 60 camps throughout the region; whereas 95% of Palestinian refugees currently rely on UNRWA to meet their daily needs of food, water and healthcare;

L. Whereas in early April, UNRWA launched an appeal for \$30 million to carry out life-sustaining assistance to the Yarmouk population;

M. Whereas on 10 April 2015 the European Commission released immediate emergency funding of EUR 2.5 million to UNRWA's operations in Syria, with specific focus on the Yarmouk camp in Damascus and in the governorates of Idlib, Dara'a and Aleppo; whereas humanitarian activities in Syria remain under severe threat as a result of chronic underfunding with the Syria Crisis Appeal currently being met at only 18.5 %;

1. Expresses its grave concern at the extreme hardship of the population in the Palestinian refugee camp of Yarmouk and whose harrowing plight under the Assad regime's siege has been further compounded by the recent, intermittent incursion of the so-called Islamic State;
2. Denounces the siege imposed by the Assad regime on Yarmouk with the support of allied militias and the bombardment of the camp, including through barrel bombs, which cause horrific suffering on the affected population; calls for an immediate lifting of the siege and an end to all attacks on the civilian population;
3. Calls on all warring parties to abide by their obligations under international law and to ensure the protection of the lives of civilians in Yarmouk; calls on all fighting parties to immediately cease their military operations in civilian populated areas in the camp;
4. Reminds the Syrian Government of its fundamental responsibility in allowing humanitarian aid to reach all populations, including in opposition-held areas such as Yarmouk ; urges the Syrian regime to release all aid workers arrested by governmental forces for attempting to smuggle aid inside the camp;
5. Calls on the international community to take urgent steps to facilitate access of humanitarian aid in compliance with UN Security Council Resolutions 2139 (2013), 2165 (2014) and 2191, which demand

unhindered passage to all areas for humanitarian personnel, equipment and transport as well as safe and unhindered evacuation of all civilians who wish to leave;

6. Calls on the Syrian regime and all other parties involved in the conflict to allow the UNRWA and other international aid organisations as well as the ICRC, immediate and unfettered access to the camp in order to deliver food and medical supplies and evacuate wounded civilians; calls for the establishment of humanitarian corridors that are neither controlled by the Syrian regime nor by IS, in light of their gross and continuous violations of international humanitarian law;

7. Commends UNRWA for its vitally important work in Syria and throughout the region in support of Palestinian refugees; expresses its strong commitment to continue working together with UNRWA and all other partners to help alleviate the suffering of the Palestinian refugees in Yarmouk and beyond; welcomes the release of EU emergency funding to UNRWA's operations and calls on the Member States and other donors to increase their support to the UNRWA's Emergency Appeal.

8. Believes the Yarmouk refugee camp exemplifies the tragic fate of the Palestinian refugees facing generation after generation a history of multiple displacement, dispossession and suffering in the absence of resolute action by the international community to end the occupation of Palestine and to allow the Palestinian refugees to return to their land;

9. Conveys the same message of solidarity to the other Palestinian refugee camps under siege by Assad's military since the winter of 2014 in Daraa and since 2013 in Sbeina and Husayneyya;

10. Expresses concern for all human rights defenders detained in the Yarmouk camp and the ones who are currently held in Syrian security forces custody; calls on all armed groups in the Yarmouk camp to end their targeting of human rights defenders, notably Jabhat al Nusra and IS;

11. Reiterates its call for a sustainable solution to the Syrian conflict through an inclusive and Syrian-led political process on the basis of the Geneva communiqué of June 2012; Welcomes the announcement of renewed Geneva talks to be held in May between the Assad regime, the opposition, UNSC members and regional powers including Iran;

12. Expresses its full support for the efforts of UN Special Envoy to Syria Staffan de Mistura in aiming for local cease-fires and the implementation of humanitarian pauses by all sides to allow the delivery of humanitarian assistance;

13. Reiterates its condemnation, in the harshest terms, of the crimes perpetrated by the Assad regime on its population, including the use of chemical weapons, incendiary weapons, cluster bombs, barrel bombs and ongoing sieges against thousands of civilians across Syria;

14. Remains convinced that there can be no sustainable peace in Syria without accountability for the crimes committed by all sides during the conflict, including in relation to the Yarmouk camp; reiterates its call for the referral of the situation in Syria to the International Criminal Court; calls on the EU and its Member States to seriously consider the recent recommendation of the UN Commission of Inquiry to explore the setting up of a special tribunal for the crimes committed in Syria;

15. Calls on the EU Member States to heed the plea of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees for much stronger commitment to burden-sharing, allowing refugees fleeing the Syrian war zones, to find protection beyond the immediate neighbouring region through resettlement, humanitarian admission schemes, simplified family reunification or more flexible visa regulations; underlines the particular need to address those facing specific vulnerabilities, such as serious medical needs or discrimination based on political opinion, religion, gender, sexual orientation or disability ;

16. Calls on the European Parliament to carry out an ad hoc visit to the Yarmouk refugee camp in order to independently assess the humanitarian situation, as soon as the security conditions allow, in coordination with the United Nations and independently from Assad's regime or any other party to the conflict;

17. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Vice-President / High Representative, the Council, the Commission, the governments and parliaments of the Member States, the Secretary-General of the United Nations, the UN-Arab League Special Envoy to Syria, the Secretary-General of the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf, and all the parties involved in the conflict in Syria.

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