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*Médecins Sans Frontières/MSF  
Ceases all its Activities in  
Several of Northeast Syria's  
Areas*

## **Médecins Sans Frontières/MSF Ceases all its Activities in Several of Northeast Syria's Areas**

*The 12.000 internally displaced persons in Ain Issa Town's camp are  
the most affected by the organization's decision, put into force on  
November 30, 2018*

## Summary:

In the Ain Issa Town's Camp<sup>1</sup>, north of Raqqa City, the concerns of thousands of internally displaced persons/IDPs were augmented, added to them civilians in the areas of Ayn al-Arab/ Kobanî and al-Tabqah, northeast Syria<sup>2</sup>. The inflated state of fear was triggered by the French [Médecins Sans Frontières/MSF \(Doctors Without Borders\)](https://www.msf.org/en/who-we-are/who-we-are)'s decision to halt all its medical activities, as well as the funding it provides to these areas starting from November 30, 2018.<sup>3</sup>

On October 31, 2018, a notice was issued by the MSF Head of Mission in Syria's North, Brian Moller, informing all the staffers contracted with the organization of the decision providing for ceasing all the activities run by the MSF in the Ain Issa Town's camp and the medical center in the al-Tabqah City, in addition to the administrative activities and those conducted by the organization's offices and storage facilities in Ayn al-Arab/ Kobanî City. The head of mission also pointed out that the halt is to be followed by the organization's administrative withdrawal from Northeast Syria on December 15, 2018. Syrians for Truth and Justice/STJ was confirmed the news by a local medical source/staffer contracted with the MSF, who said that the major reason for the organization's end of its medical activities in Northeast Syria is the expiry of the duration appointed to the activities implemented by the organization, which is to shift focus to harder hit areas, as he put it.

According to STJ's field researcher, the MSF's decision to put an end to all its medical activities in Northeast Syria has effected a severe blow to the people who benefited from the services offered by the organization in the city of al-Tabqah and the town of Ain Issa, including 12.000 displaced persons in the latter's camp, adding that the MSF-affiliated medical center in the Ain Issa Camp and the one in the al-Tabqah City stopped providing their services to the two areas' residents and the internally displaced persons alike only two weeks after the above-mentioned notice was issued, on November 15, 2018 in particular. That is 15 days ahead of the deadline. The MSF's decision to halt its medical activities in Northeast Syria has also given rise to the concerns of the area's residents and displaced, who became anxious that this international organization's withdrawal is an introduction to the retreat of all the humanitarian organizations operating in the area.

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<sup>1</sup> Ain Issa Camp: It is located to the north of the Raqqa City, specifically north of Ain Issa Town. The camp was established on March 8, 2016, following the increasing number of displaced, who fled the provinces of Raqqa and Deir ez-Zor, which back then were controlled by the Islamic State/ISIS, acronymed Daesh in Arabic. The camp incubates 12.000 Syrian internally displaced persons, most of whom are from Raqqa and Deir ez-Zor, in addition to 500 Iraqi refugees. The camp is run by the Autonomous Administration, under the auspice of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees/UNHCR.

<sup>2</sup> It is held by the Syrian Democratic Forces/SDF while run by the Autonomous Administration.

<sup>3</sup> A notice to cease all activities issued by the MSF Head of Mission in Northern Syria on October 31, 2018. The notice was provided by one of the organization's local contractors.

In a former report, STJ covered the severely deteriorating humanitarian conditions in the Ain Issa Camp, which resulted from the lack of basic services necessary to the displaced, such as shortage of food materials and the exacerbating medical status.<sup>4</sup>



A photo of the notice issued by the MSF Head of Mission in Northern Syria, Brian Moller, on October 31, 2018, concerning the cession of all its medical activities and the support it provides in the area.

Photo credit: Local staffer contracted with the MSF in Northeast Syria.

<sup>4</sup> "Ain Issa Camp Destination for the Fleeing from Deir ez-Zur Battles and Prior to that the Fleeing from Ar-Raqqa Battles." STJ, on December 2, 2017. Last visited: November 21, 2019. <https://stj-sy.org/en/347/>.



## 1. “We are Come to Sell all the Aid We are Getting for Cheap Prices just to Buy Medications”:

In the Ain Issa Camp, 12.000 Syrian internally displaced persons, of whom 5.000 are children, in addition to 500 Iraqi refugees, constitute the group most affected by MSF's decision to halt all its medical activities and the support it offers in Northeast Syria, according to several testimonies obtained by STJ in late November 2018.



Ain Issa Camp's location – Raqqa

Fatimah al- Hamad, 45 years old, a woman displaced from the town of Maskanah, rural Aleppo, to Ain Issa Camp in July 2018, told STJ that MSF's decision to end its activities in the camp had a negative impact on all its residents, including her 12-member-family. She continued her account adding that:

**“Two months into our displacement to the Ain Issa Camp, my 12-year-old son, Nizar Mustafa al-Ali, had an accident, for he was hit by a motorcycle on the highway near the camp. We failed to identify the rider. My son sustained a backbone injury, however, which rendered him in need of a catheter all the time. The accident also**

deprived him of the ability to move for a while, which in turn caused him bed sores<sup>5</sup>. It was almost a year ago. The MSF helped us hundreds of times in the camp, as it provided us with gauze, sterilizer and medical plaster, demanded by my son's condition, whose wounds' bandage had to be changed three times a day. The organization offered us these medical services since the day my son was hit, which benefited us greatly. Nonetheless, now, particularly after the organization stopped its activities within the camp, we are coerced into selling all the aid we are provided for cheap prices just to buy my son's treatment supplies. In addition to diapers and bandage change, my son needs a catheter every 15 days."

The MSF, displaced Fatimah al-Hamad pointed out, used also to refer patients who needed medical services outside the camp to the hospitals in the two cities of Tell Abiad and Ayn al-Arab/ Kobanî. Commenting on this note, she said:

"Shortly after, my son's wounds were infected. Responding, the MSF referred us to the National Hospital in Tell Abiad City. We spent eight days there, until my son's wounds got better. The organization paid the hospital's charges and those of transportation. Once, my son trampled by the tent's fence and fell down. The incident cost him his ability to move his right arm for several months. The MSF again took it on itself to refer him to the National Hospital in Tell Abiad City numerous times to get his arm radiographed, not to mention that it met all the costs of his physical therapy till he managed to move his arm again. The MSF used to refer us to the hospitals in the two cities of Tell Abiad and Ayn al-Arab/ Kobanî at its own expense. This is why stopping its activities within the Ain Issa Camp has caused us severe harm."

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<sup>5</sup> Bed sores is a damage that affects the skin and underlying tissue resulting from prolonged pressure on the skin, which compromises blood supply and makes skin more vulnerable to sustaining lesions and sores. <https://www.syr-res.com/article/11125.html>.



The MSF-affiliated medical center in Ain Issa Camp, northern rural Raqqqa City, before it was shut down. Taken on November 19, 2018. Photo credit: STJ.

Noufah Mufddi Attalah, 42 years old displaced woman at the Ain Issa Camp, born in the city of al-Rasafah, southern rural Raqqqa City, told STJ that medical care in Ain Issa Camp has been witnessing a marked deterioration, especially following MSF's decision to put an end to its activities in the camp. Commenting on this, she added:

**"I have been living in Ain Issa Camp since March 2017, accompanied by my 10-member-family. My 4-year-old son, Mohammad Mahmoud al-Saloum, has hypospadias<sup>6</sup> and needs a surgery that costs 200.000 Syrian Pounds. I cannot afford this sum of money to help him undergo the surgery. The medical centers within the camp also did not help us, unlike the MSF which used to provide us with all the medical aid available, including checkups, diagnoses and medications for free. It also hospitalized the cases which needed tests, radiography and other services to hospitals in the two cities of Tell Abiad and Ayn al-Arab/ Kobani at its own expense. It is for this reason that the cession of the organization's activities had hit us all so hard, especially since winter is setting in. Diseases such as flue and measles would certainly spread in the camp. Before, the organization used to address all the**

<sup>6</sup> A congenital condition in males in which the opening of the urethra is not in its normal place. The severity of the condition varies— some are less acute and less complicated than others.

<https://www.webteb.com/articles/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%AD%D9%84%D9%8A%D9%84-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D8%AD%D8%AA%D9%8A-%D9%85%D8%B4%D9%83%D9%84%D8%A9-%D9%84%D9%84%D8%B1%D8%AC%D8%A7%D9%84-%D9%81%D9%82%D8%B7%2018098>.

diseases in the camp, even hospitalizing the people affected when needed. Its services were of great importance, contrary to the rest of the medical centers within the camp, which only offer first aid services.”

According to Noufah Attalah, following MSF’s decision to cease all its activities in Ain Issa Camp, the emergency medical services within the camp were limited to the [Kurdish Red Crescent’s](#) ambulance, the only remaining one, not to mention that the organization’s withdrawal made these areas’ residents and displaced anxious, believing that the rest of the humanitarian organizations active there would follow its suit. Noufah added:

“In the winter of 2017, my son Mohammad Mahmoud al-Saloum, developed bronchitis, caused by inhaling kerosene heater smoke, which we were provided by the [UNHCR](#). The ambulances of the MSF hospitalized him to the National Hospital in the city of Tell Abiad. MSF’s ambulance transported my son to the hospital, where he was to be administered medication through a nebulizer, periodically for over a month. The organization designated an ambulance to hospitalize patients whose case had to be treated outside the camp. Today, however, we cannot afford an average cost of 10.000 Syrian Pounds to transport our sick children onboard private cars to the hospitals in nearby cities, given that the Kurdish Red Crescent’s ambulance hospitalizes urgent cases only.”

## 2. “MSF’s Decision to Suspend all its Medical Activities within the Camp Heavily Affected Thousands of IDPs”:

The joint director of Ain Issa Camp told STJ that the population, amounting to 12.000 displaced persons, 8.000 of whom are displaced from Deir ez-Zor Province, 3.000 from Raqqa Province and 500 from the provinces of Aleppo and Idlib, in addition to 500 Iraqi refugees have all come to suffer a shortage on medical care, especially with MSF’s suspension of all its medical activities in the camp while winter approaches. He added:

“The MSF was one of the organizations that offered its medical services free of charge to the residents of Ain Issa Town’s camp, since its establishment on March 8, 2016. It provided checkups, diagnoses, medications and psychological support services, in addition to an ambulance, which it allocated to transporting the cases that needed referral to hospitals. This is why the MSF’s decision to stop all its activities within the camp had a severe impact on the residents, for the camp lacks medications, not to mention that the current medical services that the camp’s residents are being offered are limited to first aid, which the Kurdish Red Crescent and the Al-Mawaddah Charity Association provide, in addition to the Dutch-MSF, which delivers vaccinations. These services are not sufficient at all because Ain Issa Camp is in need for a medical center of its own that provides more than medical services and which has a great impact on the displaced, especially with winter being around the corner. It is also important to mention that one ambulance, affiliated



with the Kurdish Red Crescent, is not enough to cover a camp with 12.000 displaced persons, including 2800 families at least.”





Photos of Ain Issa Camp. Taken on November 19, 2019. Photo credit: STJ.

### 3. They Cannot Afford Healthcare at Hospitals and Private Clinics:

MSF's decision to put an end to all its medical activities and support it provides in northeast Syria has harmed thousands of al-Tabqah City's residents as well, after the organization closed down its Primary Healthcare Center in the city in mid-November 2018.

Commenting on this, Raed al-Khatib, a resident of al-Tabqah, told STJ that the closure of MSF's Primary Healthcare Center has inflated the burdens of the city's residents when it comes to medical services, especially those who sought refuge in the city, fleeing Raqqa City and its affiliated villages. He recounted the following:

**"The Primary Healthcare Center in al-Tabqah City used to provide medical support to residents and IDPs since it was first opened by the MSF on September 5, 2017. The center included departments of internal medicine, pediatric medicine, leishmaniasis and psychological therapy, in addition to the bandaging and first aid department. The center**

also offered screening, diagnosis and medications for free. However, it ceased offering its services on November 15, 2018, which had a severe impact on thousands of people, especially the people displaced from the Raqqa City and its affiliated villages, who cannot afford the costs of healthcare and treatment at private hospitals and clinics, not to mention the soaring expenses of medications.”



The MSF-affiliated medical center in the al-Tabqah City before its activities were brought to a halt by the organization. Photo credit: [Furat FM](#).



## **4. Duration Fixed for the Organization's Activities in Northeast Syria Expired:**

On the same note, a local medical source, contracted with the MSF, told STJ that the organization has stopped all its medical activities in the Ayn al-Arab/ Kobanî in February 2018, explaining that the services halted in the city recently are all administrative ones, including shutting down the organization's offices and its storage facilities, which supplied aid to other areas where the MSF used to operate in Northeast Syria.

The main reason to MSF's cession of all its medical activities and support in Northeast Syria, the same source added, is the expiry of the duration fixed for the organization's services in the areas of Ayn al-Arab/ Kobanî, al-Tabqah and Ain Issa and its need to move to more severely affected areas, according to the organization's plan.

## **Recommendations:**

### **1. To the Autonomous Administration in Northeast Syria:**

The Autonomous Administration must take immediate measures to provide the locals and the displaced in Northeast Syria with needed healthcare and facilitate for the work of local and international organizations, as to meet the needs of people affected by the conflict, especially those based in IDP assembly areas.

### **2. To the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees/UNHCR:**

The UNHCR must take steps to provide the displaced and refugees in Northeast Syria with healthcare, assess needs and set up a preliminary work plan that provides non-governmental donors, international and local organizations with an accurate image of what is needed.

### **3. To the United Nations Children's Fund/UNICEF:**

The UNICEF must consider appropriate support mechanisms to provide children, affected by the conflict, in Northeast Syria with healthcare, especially those located in IDP assembly areas.

### **4. To Non-governmental Local and International Organizations:**

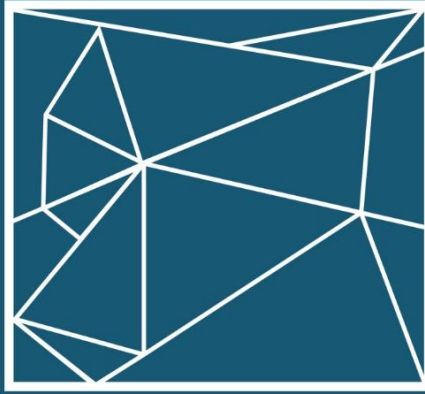
The non-governmental local and international organizations must boost effort to meet the needs of the people affected by conflict, on top of which is securing immediate and pressing healthcare in IDP assembly areas.

### **5. To IDPs and Conflict-affected Persons:**

The internally displaced persons must cooperate and organize efforts, inside and outside the IDP assembly areas, as well as come up with plans and solutions to address the obstacles challenging them.



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## History

Syrians for Truth and Justice was conceived during the participation of its co-founder in the Middle-East Partnership Initiative (MEPI) Leaders for Democracy Fellowship program, who was driven by a will to contribute to Syria's future. Starting as a humble project to tell the stories of Syrians experiencing enforced disappearances and torture, it grew into an established organisation committed to unveiling human rights violations of all sorts.

Convinced that the diversity that has historically defined Syria is a wealth, our team of researchers and volunteers works with dedication at uncovering human rights violations committed in Syria, in order to promote inclusiveness and ensure that all Syrians are represented, and their rights fulfilled.

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