

## **Children in NW Syria at grave danger amid the cholera outbreak and the onset of the harsh winter - Syrian humanitarians warn**

Thousands of children in northwest Syria are denied access to proper healthcare and education, having to live under the threat of cholera amid harsh living conditions and a worsening economy.

The past winter seasons saw people, who had already been displaced by bombardment, forced again from their tents as camps were flooded by heavy rain snowstorms. This year, an outbreak of cholera, continuous shelling and bombardment, and funding shortages pose a dangerous prelude to the deepening education and livelihood crisis for the millions of civilians in northwest Syria, including at least 1,073,932 children enroll at school.

Cholera has made a comeback in all of Syria, and if not stopped, it is expected to have a catastrophic impact on the country's healthcare and sanitation infrastructure, already been devastated by years of bombing and COVID. In the northwest, it is very alarming that no emergency funds have been allocated to respond to this crisis and offer minimum protection to school children by sterilizing water sources, raising concerns among families that their children will be exposed to the disease and leaving many with no other choice than to drop their children from schools to protect them (According to ACU, at least 800,000 children are out of schools in northwest Syria)

In the past three years, ten children have heartbreakingly died as a result of freezing temperatures and unsafe heating, and this year more lives will be at risk of dying of cholera, especially in overcrowded camps that lack basic infrastructure and access to clean water. For many, this will be the eleventh consecutive winter in displacement, with families facing even greater hardship this year due to the economic crisis and the socioeconomic aftershock of rising prices and shortages in basic necessities.

Schools have consistently recorded a 30-40% reduction in attendance during the coldest months of the year-- typically lasting from mid-December to mid-February. Sickness and absenteeism linked to cold weather were the top causes reported for children missing out on school. In a recent assessment of 3,992 functional and nonfunctional schools conducted by the Assistance Coordination Unit organization, the need for heating oil came at the top of the list of children's needs.

Despite the efforts by education actors and donors, the education system in Syria has largely broken down, exacerbated further by targeting schools, a deteriorating economy, and harsh weather conditions. The latest data available from HNO 2021 shows an estimated 2.45 million children are out of school, and a further 1.6 million children are at risk of dropping out. If left out of school, these children will be subjected to all kinds of abuse, including early marriage and child labor.

How can we expect children, most of them under ten years old, to endure freezing temperatures in classrooms that lack proper heating? How can we expect parents to send their children to schools that lack clean water?

We are a group of Syrian NGOs urging all parties and donors to avert a potential collapse in the educational system and take all the necessary steps to save thousands of lives in northwest Syria.

We ask you to immediately allocate the necessary funding for effective winterization that is not only reactive to the immediate needs resulting from extreme winter conditions but also preventive in nature. Providing proper heating will encourage more teachers and students to attend school and allow schools at risk of closing this winter to keep their doors open for more children.

We demand that you prioritize releasing funds to save children's lives by sterilizing water in all schools to protect students from exposure to the cholera disease.

In the past years, we learned that schools are safe shelters for thousands of children who have witnessed unbearable tragedies, from losing family members to being forcibly displaced. Maintaining routines and spending time with their teachers and classmates have helped many children cope with trauma. Schools have also helped protect many children from being forced into early marriage, child labor, and other kinds of abuse.

We call on you not to leave those children alone and to join us in doing everything possible to protect them and ensure they have access to their basic right to education.

## **Signatories:**

NGO Forum

Assistance Coordination Unit

World Vision International

Education without Borders /Midad

OLIVE RANCH ORGANISATION

Sadad Humanitarian Organization

Bousla for Development & Innovation

Idlib Education Directorate

ATHAR

Nasaem Khair Organization

Hurras network

The Ministry of Education in the Syrian Interim Government

The Union of Parents in the Liberated NS

Free Syrian Teachers Syndicate

Social Development International - SDI

Saed Charity Association

Medical Association of Syrian Expatriates – Sima

Bonyan for Youth and Development Organization

WATAN Foundation

Emissa for Development

Maram Foundation

Useful Women

*Syrian NGO Alliance (SNA):*

Al-Sham Humanitarian Foundation

ATAA Humanitarian Relief Association

Big Heart Foundation

BINAA Organization for Development

Ghiras Al-Nahda

Hand in Hand for Aid and Development

Horan Foundation

Humanitarian Relief Association - IYD

Ihsan Relief and Development

Önder for Cooperation and Development

Orange Organization

Physicians Across Continents

Rahma Worldwide – Aid and Development

Shafak Organization

SKT organization

Social Development International (SDI)

Syrian American Medical Society (SAMS)

Syria Relief - Turkey

Syria Relief and Development (SRD)

Syrian Expatriate Medical Association (SEMA)

Takaful Al-Sham Charity

Union of Medical Care and Relief Organizations (UOSSM)

Violet organization for relief and development