



ACLS Northwest Syria Earthquake SitRep for 15 February 2023

By Mahmoud al-Bakour

1. Casualty, Damage, and Displacement Toll Still Rising. The Syria Response Coordinators team reported on Wednesday that the number of people displaced from the affected areas of Northwest Syria has risen to 153,893 people (30,796 families), a figure that will rise because the census of the newly displaced is ongoing. The number of completely destroyed homes has risen to 1,123, with another 3,484 that are damaged and likely to collapse. The number of additional uninhabitable homes as a result of various kinds of damage is 13,733, while cracks appeared on 9,637 other homes.

Also as of Wednesday, the number of Syrians who died in Turkey and whose bodies have been transported back into Northwest Syria for burial has risen to 1,413.

2. Northwest Syria Medical Sector Facing Catastrophe. The medical sector in northern Syria is facing a catastrophe after the earthquake that hit the region and caused the death of more than 2,600 people and thousands of injured, according to the Idlib Health Directorate, which operates in the area under the control of the Syrian opposition forces.

Dr. Zohair Karrat, Director of Health in Idlib, says the medical situation is dire. During the first three days of the earthquake response, no medical aid entered Northwest Syria, not even cadres of doctors. In addition, Turkish authorities did not allow Northwest Syria authorities and residents to take patients into Turkiye for treatment, because medical facilities on the Turkish side was also severely affected by the earthquake, and the number of patients in southern Turkiye far exceeded the capacity of the region's hospitals.

Consequently, many Syrian patients were placed in hospital corridors, with those needing surgeries far exceeding the capacity of Northwest Syria's hospital operating rooms. Due to the crushing injuries caused by the rubble, intensive care units need emergency dialysis sessions, but the dialysis centers' capacity is insufficient for the number of patients. More than 12,000 patients were admitted to hospitals in the Idlib governorate alone.

Karrat added that most of the hospitals that received the injured in the province (Harem Hospital, Mashaqa Uday Hospital, Salqin Hospital, Bab Al-Hawa Hospital, Darkush Hospital, Aqrabat Hospital, the Governorate Hospital, and the specialized surgical hospital in Idlib, Al-Shifa Hospital, University Hospital, Armnaz Hospital) have depleted all their energies, stocks, and supplies, and medical warehouses are also suffering from a severe shortage.



Karrat said there has been a massive failure by all the UN agencies. He said that he had met with UN aid chief Martin Griffiths, who assured Northwest Syrian authorities that there has been a significant failure on the part of the UN, for which the UN must apologize. Griffiths acknowledged the UN's inability to provide urgent support to the health sector in Northwest Syria, and this failure tragically contributed to the loss of many injured people's lives. Some medical aid has entered Northwest Syria in recent days, but the aid supplied does not cover even 10 percent of the large deficit in the health sector.

Karrat said Northwest Syria is in urgent need of medicine and medical disposables in general, especially intensive care unit medicines, dialysis supplies, orthopedic supplies, neurosurgical supplies, vascular surgery, reconstructive surgery, albumin, antibiotics, ventilators, dialysis devices, baby incubators, magnetic resonance devices, radiology devices, operating costs, and generators to enable hospitals to use medical devices.

Dr. Wajih Tarraf, who specializes in orthopedic surgery, is director of Harem General Hospital. Tarraf said his was the closest hospital to the destroyed building blocks in Idlib city and neighboring villages, and received 2,200 patients within 48 hours. As of the 10th day following the earthquake, Tarraf's hospital had received 3,200 patients and medical cases, many of them complex injuries. The hospital was not equipped to handle this massive number of injured people, which led to terrifying days in which the wounded had to be triaged and only those in the most dangerous condition receiving treatment as soon as possible and prioritized according to the chances of survival. Tarraf said the situation was a shock for him and the hospital. Their resources were severely depleted as they faced a state of emergency in all medical sectors, with the complete absence of international medical support.

Tarraf noted that the situation was made more acute by the fact that 18 medical facilities in Northwest Syria had been forced to cease work due to a loss of donor funds months before the earthquake. For those that remained open, infrastructure is dilapidated and all hospitals and medical centers have exhausted their capacity. Tarraf said the medical facilities have sent urgent appeals for international intervention to support the health sector, but the response has been slow and insufficient. "Until now, we do not know the reasons for this failure," Tarraf said.

Finally, **Dr. Ahmed Zaytoun**, consultant in thoracic and vascular surgery from the Qatari Red Crescent delegation, said his team arrived to find "hospitals crowded with patients, many of whom were in very critical condition and needed urgent surgical interventions. Yesterday [Tuesday] we performed 45 surgeries in just one hospital, and we hope for rapid support for the health sector from all those responsible for that."



3. UN Aid Update. On Wednesday, a senior UN delegation crossed into Northwest Syria through the Bab al-Salama border crossing for the first time to hold meetings in the surrounding area. The delegation crossed Bab al-Salama one day after the same delegation entered through the Bab al-Hawa crossing and held meetings in Idlib countryside.

Also on Wednesday, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres launched an emergency appeal to raise about \$400 million to help the earthquake victims in Syria over a period of three months, at a time when the United Nations is facing harsh criticism for its delay in responding to the devastating earthquake in northern Syria, and for its seeming preference to supply the Assad regime with aid.

