



# *COVID-19 in Conflict Countries*

*Report of  
The Forum for Development and Human Rights Dialogue*

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*The Forum for Development and Human Rights Dialogue has followed the situation of right to health in conflict countries (Yemen, Syria and Libya) and refugees' conditions who were expelled by Turkey on Greek borders during the stage when COVID-19 turns to pandemic and infected many people in most countries all over the world. This requires special precautionary measures to prevent the disease outbreak; the matter which has not been done in those countries which still witness direct threat to right to life because of the continuous conflict, international interventions and inability of conflicting parties to reach an agreement which insures ceasing conflict and returning to normal life.*

*Non-announcement of COVID-19 cases in such countries and the capacity of their medical bodies against the disease has been a controversial and questionable matter especially with its outbreak in big developed countries in health care field. Consequently, World Health Organization and the United Nations Missions have launched calls for conflict parties to stop and be interested in and pay attention to protection measures so that the infection will not be transmitted inside conflict countries or among refugees when facing the infection will be so difficult. On the other hand, WHO warned that there are strong indicators in regard to COVID-19 cases in Syria and Yemen.*

### **Yemen**

*Although Yemen has not recorded any COVID-19 case, yet the conflict parties in Yemen especially Al Houthi group has tried to make use of the pandemic outbreak and placed and used it politically. The Forum for Development and Human Rights Dialogue has monitored that Al Houthi militias used mosques to urge people to fight with them instead of dying in their homes because of COVID-19. In addition, the militias addressed the residents of the areas they controlled saying that COVID-19 is an American conspiracy against Iran and Yemen. This was said by the Minister of Information and Communications of Al Houthi militias Daif Allah Al Shamy in a way through which the supported militias by Iran (and which controlled Yemen) lead Yemen to 'drown' within the risks of COVID-19 risks through the measures and procedures they follow.*

*Al Houthi militias established a place for quarantine as they called in Al Bydaa governorate where they put about 10.000 people. This place was not only for quarantine but also was for recruiting Yemenis and push them within fight fronts. Throughout their delegations to Yemen, the United Nations warned against the outbreak of COVID-19*



*among prisoners, kidnapped and arrested people in the prisons of Al Houthi militias. Also the delegation calls for the release of all people in prisons and detention places so that they will not be infected with COVID-19.*

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*Al Houthi militias arrest thousands of Yemenis in prisons and detentions places all of which do not have the minimum safety conditions and represent dangerous focal points of virus outbreak; the matter which will lead to a disaster inside these prisons and detention places especially as many of arrested people left these detention places while they are infected with chronic diseases as they were deprived from health services.*

*Although WHO has not recorded any COVID-19 cases in Yemen till now, yet medical estimations in Yemen warn against potential disastrous results in Yemen due to Al Houthi militias' practices in the areas they control since they organize sectarian gatherings and public events while the whole world follow full isolation procedures and cancel gatherings and events.*

*The main fear is that these sectarian gatherings of Al Houthi militias in Yemen may repeat what happened in Iran as "Kam" city turned out to be a focal point of COVID-19 outbreak because of sectarian gatherings in the city which represents a stronghold of the extremist sectarian thought which was exported by Tehran to its arms and affiliations in the region. Moreover, all sources agree that Al Houthi militias call the population to not visit hospitals to get medicines when infected with COVID-19 and warned hospitals to receive any potential infected cases with COVID-19. Also hospitals are almost full of injured people of Al Houthi militias and all medical staffs.*

*Al Houthi has announced closing schools after news about recording COVID-19 cases according to the reporter of Monte Carlo International Radio in Yemen. In addition, WHO has assured that it works in Yemen alongside with health authorities and partners to ensure readiness and preparedness for response in case of confirmed COVID-19 infection.*

## **Libya**

*Considering it an isolated area, international reports say that the possibilities of COVID-19 infection in Libya are limited. Countries where this pandemic spread are those countries where there was air traffic and transportations among countries and this was not there in Libya. Also the international reports linked this with the continuous conflict status in Libya between the Libyan National Army and armed militias affiliated*



to the illegal Al Wafaq government and stopping work in Libya airports because of mutual shelling while doubts and obsessions surrounded the armed elements which Turkey sent to support Al Wafaq government after the appearance of hundreds of infected cases in Turkey.

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In its statement, the United Nations Delegation in Libya called the conflict parties in Libya to cease fire humanitarily to help in efforts of facing COVID-19. This statement came after Disease Control Center has warned that the country situation do not allow to face the disease outbreak. In addition, the statement called all conflict parties in Libya to cease fire and fighting in addition to stopping continuous transportation of all military equipment and personnel to Libya to allow local authorities to respond to this unprecedented public health challenge represented by COVID-19 besides taking all necessary measures to support health and welfare of all Libyans. The National Libyan Army welcomed the call for ceasing fire and fight for humane purposes and called Libyans to line up to face COVID-19.

### **Syria**

Along with warnings by WHO regarding COVID-19 infection cases in Syria and denial by Syrian government, the situation in Syria seems to be worrisome and vague because it is geographically near Iran which is the focal point of the disease outbreak in the Gulf and Iraq. In regard to Syria situation, the official in WHO declared that “I am sure that the virus spreads there but they did not detect infected cases till now in one way or another. This is what I feel but I do not have evidence and sooner or later we expect an outbreak there”.

On the other hand, the Syrian Minister of Health, Nizar Yazgy, denied the existence of any confirmed COVID-19 infection cases. He added that all tests done by ministry of health labs were all negative. According to the Official Syrian News Agency, Yazgy also said that alongside with Al Yazdani National Hospital which was dedicated for isolation with a full medical staff, the ministry of health worked to raise the preparedness of other places to be dedicated for Syrian comers from countries where there are COVID-19 confirmed cases to isolate them for 14 days and to take samples for analyze them in the labs of the ministry of health to follow up their conditions and make sure that they are in good health periodically”. In addition, he added that the ministry of health has coordinated with other ministries to be integration in confrontation efforts against



*COVID-19 through putting regulations for citizens to stay at homes as it is a real protection to prevent any infection or outbreak at any stage”.*

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*Moreover, the Syrian Observation Center for Human Rights assured through medical sources in Damascus, Hams, Lazakia and Tartous that COVID-19 confirmed infections which were put in quarantine due to the outbreak of the virus reached 128 cases, 56 left after they tested negative for COVID-19 while 72 are still in the quarantine waiting their analysis results.*

*In Al Mayadin city in the east of Dayr Al Zour, COVID-19 confirmed cases rose to reach 15 cases among militias supported Iran: 11 Iranians and 4 Iraqis while one Iranian died because of pneumonia and it was said later that it was due to the virus infection. In addition, the Syrian government posted on Facebook calling the ministries to take necessary measures to suspend work in ministries and their affiliated bodies and where suspending work does not represent an obstacle in front of facing risks of COVID-19 outbreak. Also Syria witnessed suspension of commercial, service, cultural and social activities in all governorates in addition to closing markets as the government took previous decisions and procedures to suspend and close schools and universities and reducing employees' number in public sector administrative institutions to 40%. Besides, services centers, parks, cinemas, theatres, clubs, amusement parks, internet cafes, night clubs and occasions halls in all governorates were all closed. In its statement, the Syrian Ministry of Defense declared that it suspended all military sports activities in military barracks and all activities which required gathering especially in closed places. In addition, the ministry reduced gatherings and congestion to protect fighters in blocks and the necessity of wearing gloves and masks.*

### **COVID-19 & Syrian Refugees**

*Fears and concerns are increasing in regard to the possibility of COVID-19 outbreak in refugees' camps on the Greek Turkish borders after they were dismissed by Turkish Regime from their previous camps especially as they were deprived from medical care in these camps; the matter which increased fears regarding the disease outbreak among them. Also more than 40.000 of asylum seekers live in camps on islands in the east of Aegean Sea which exceeded its capacity, according to Greek authorities. The Greek authorities have expressed their concern and fear of COVID-19 outbreak in Greek islands where there are thousands of migrants and asylum seekers. This came with the first confirmed COVID-19 infection in Lesbos Island.*



*Regarding the preventive measures to reduce COVID-19 outbreak in camps, the Greek authorities said that they worked upon starting trainings for refugees on how to protect yourself against the virus through hygiene. Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF) called Greek authorities to immediately evacuate migrants from camps on Greek islands because of high risk of COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, MSF, which provides medical care to migrants and asylum seekers, said that we should be realistic as it will be impossible to control the virus outbreak in camps with such conditions.*

*For example, Morya camp on Lesbos Island was established to include 3000 refugees, yet it actually includes at least 15000 refugees. MSF added that in some areas of the camp about 1300 persons share one tap without providing hygiene tools such as soap. Some journalistic reports said that the danger of COVID-19 infection for refugees who reside in big cities is greater compared to refugees who live in big camps.*

*Also there were strong warnings from the dangerous situation in Idlib which seems to be prepared for the virus outbreak. International reports assured that regions controlled by Turks will witness 'a sweeping' outbreak of the disease because of lack of medical services, food, pure water and also due to cold weather.*

*Moreover, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees recommended that the whole world response to COVID-19 crisis should focus on and include all including those who were forced to escape and leave their homes shedding light on old people among refugees and forced displaced people as being the most vulnerable category all over the world. The commissioner seeks to get an amount of 33 million \$ to strengthen activities of preparedness, response and protection to fulfill urgent needs of public health resulted by COVID-19 for refugees.*

### **Recommendations**

- 1- The Forum for Development and Human Rights Dialogue calls governments and officials in conflict countries (Yemen – Syria – Libya) to stop conflicts and to be transparent in announcing COVID-19 infected cases and taking precautionary measures to control the disease before outbreak stage.*
- 2- Disseminating protection and prevention ways against the disease widely and stopping conspiracy discourse, doubting and questioning the disease seriousness or use it in the political conflict in conflict countries.*



- 3- *Supporting the efforts of WHO in identifying ways of personal protection against the disease and ask for its help in treating cases.*
- 4- *Facilitating work of organizations and bodies concerned with helping refugees and transporting prevention tools and treatment equipment immediately to their camps.*
- 5- *Holding an agreement among conflict parties in Idlib to facilitate the international organizations entrance and provide medical care and human aids to the city's residents.*
- 6- *Providing necessary fund for the international organizations concerned with refugees so that they could provide medical care for them especially as refugees are in bad need to field hospitals to provide necessary medical care for them after detecting confirmed COVID-19 infections.*