YARMOUK CAMP
The Abandoned Pain

A report documenting the human rights violations in the aftermath of the Syrian military operation in

Yarmouk Refugee Camp

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Introduction

Yarmouk Refugee Camp, whose population represents the largest concentration of Palestinian refugees in Syria, has paid a heavy toll for the crisis while the fighting in Syria remains ongoing for seven years now. The camp’s houses, hospitals, mosques and schools, including UNRWA schools, were heavily damaged by frequent aerial and artillery bombing by various conflicting parties. Since December 2012, the Camp’s population has been subjected to a siege that has resulted in the death of about 200 refugees due to hunger and lack of medical care.

From the beginning of the crisis until June 2018, the number of Palestinian victims from Yarmouk refugee camp amounted to 1,392,¹ most of whom died as a result of bombing, siege or torture to death in Syrian regime prisons. Members of the so-called Islamic State group controlled the camp during the past few years, and also bear responsibility for the killing of several refugees in the camp.

On 19 April 2018, the Syrian Army launched a large-scale military operation...
that lasted for 33 days, which only ended with the regime’s recapture of the camp following a Russian-brokered agreement between the parties to end the fighting. The conditions set for this agreement remain undeclared, with only leaks published by Russian media announcing the agreement itself.

Once concluded in May 2018, the military operations left great losses to civilian infrastructure, with almost 80% of houses in the camp nearing complete destruction. Several houses have also been reportedly looted in a systematic and organized manner. Responding to the situation, Chris Gunness, spokesperson for UNRWA, said: “Today [Yarmouk] lies in ruins, with hardly a house untouched by the conflict.”

Through testimonies and cases gathered from victims and eyewitnesses and documented in this report, the Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Monitor aims to bring the grave humanitarian situation and rights violations committed in the camp to the attention of concerned human rights groups and researchers.

The first chapter is dedicated to shed light to the life in the camp prior to the massive military operation launched by the regime army on April 19, 2018. It also follows on the violations of all armed groups that had been in control of the camp until then. The second chapter is devoted to following on the violations committed by the Syrian regime during its said operation. Meanwhile, the third chapter deals with the violations that occurred after the Syrian regime took control of the camp and after the withdrawal of all non-government forces.
Background of Yarmouk Camp

The refugee camp of Yarmouk is one of the largest refugee camps in Syria as well as in Palestine’s neighboring countries. It was established in 1957 on an area of 2.1 square kilometers in the Syrian capital of Damascus. It was not a camp in the strict sense of the word. Rather, it was a civilian area consisting of residential buildings, markets, medical centers, hospitals, mosques and schools.

Up until the beginning of the Syrian Crisis, the camp housed 144,000 Palestinian refugees. Right before the Syrian regime’s military operation, their number dropped to 6,300 refugees according to statistics published by the Palestine refugee agency (known as UNRWA) in April 2018.

It should be noted that UNRWA did not officially recognize the Yarmouk camp on the list of Palestine’s refugee camps in Syria. The reason for the lack of such recognition lies behind the fact that the camp was established by the Syrian government and not by the Agency.
The services provided by UNRWA to recognized and unrecognized refugee camps are no different, except that UNRWA is not responsible for solid waste collection in unofficial camps. Nonetheless, the agency provides all other services from health care to education and development projects to Palestine refugees.

The Yarmouk refugee camp enjoys a high status among Palestinian refugees in Syria and in neighboring countries. It is known as the “capital of the Palestinian diaspora,” with its markets standing as a destination for many residents in the neighboring city of Damascus.
First:

**Yarmouk Camp and the beginning of the Syrian Crisis**

Initially, Palestinian residents and representatives from Palestinian parties inside the camp made every effort to avoid being part in the crisis, with Palestinian officials repeatedly stating that the camp should not be the center of fighting among conflicting parties. However, these calls and attempts have been rendered mute or thwarted by the actions of the different conflicting parties in Syria.

Given the Camp’s initial status as a safe zone, residents from surrounding residential areas subjected to military operations, including from Al Maydan and Al Hajar al-Aswad neighborhoods, fled to the camp, taking temporary shelter in schools. However, Yarmouk Camp was then subjected to sporadic mortar shelling, particularly from some nearby neighborhoods where military operations were taking place.
The situation continued until 16 December 2012, when a warplane belonging to the Syrian Army targeted Abdul Qadir al-Husseini Mosque, which was a shelter for dozens of displaced families from the neighborhood, resulting in the death and injury of dozens of civilians. While the Syrian regime denied responsibility for that attack at first, some media outlets close to it announced that it was targeting a location belonging to the Syrian Opposition.

This attack was followed by a considerable wave of displacement by residents in the Yarmouk Camp, prompted partly by ill-intentioned rumors claiming that the regime was about to launch a wide-scale military operation. Almost 80% of the Camp’s residents left, most of them on foot, to their relatives or to shelters in other Palestinian refugee camps in Damascus and its countryside.

These incidents coincided with armed opposition groups entering the Camp, thus prompting the Syrian Army to impose a partial siege on 12 December 2012, while preventing the transport of trucks carrying essential materials into the Camp, with only individuals allowed to move freely. In addition, the Syrian Army set up roadblocks and checkpoints controlling the entrances to the Camp in order to prevent access by members of the Syrian opposition, who had then taken control of the Camp, to nearby neighborhoods controlled by the Syrian Regime.

The siege began to intensify, resulting in a full siege of the Yarmouk Camp in July 2013. In May 2018, the Syrian Regime had already taken full control of the Camp. Throughout that period, thousands of Palestinian refugees got stuck in the Camp, and over 200 of them died due to hunger or shortage of medicine and medical treatment. The Syrian government did not allow access
of medical personnel, medical supplies or first aid into the Camp. It further cut off water and electricity supply to the Camp.

When the Camp ran out of food supply, residents were forced to eat but grass and water mixed with some spices in order for them and their children to survive.

Civilians were not spared the human rights violations committed by the Syrian Opposition either. Throughout that period, different groups took control of the Yarmouk refugee Camp. At first, it was controlled by groups from the Free Syrian Army and some Palestinian groups. Then, it witnessed a series of struggles between armed groups from the Syrian Opposition on the one hand and the Nusra Front and ISIS on the other. The camp ended up in the hands of ISIS, with the group taking effective control of most neighborhoods in the camp in 2015.
ISIS and the Nusra Front in Yarmouk Camp

During 2015, the Nusra Front started expanding its areas of control, while areas under other Syrian Opposition armed groups’ control were shrinking. The conflict among these parties reached its peak in April 2015; the Nusra Front allied with ISIS against the other Syrian Opposition armed groups, who had lost control of many parts of the Camp. Accordingly, residents of the Yarmouk Camp were again subjected to siege and gross abuses by all parties to the Syrian Crisis.

After the Nusra Front and ISIS expanded their areas of control, ISIS started to gain more control, imposing certain rules and restrictions on the residents of the Camp in regards to their lifestyle- clothing and social norms. It also started to impose its own beliefs, while also committing many other violations against the Camp’s residents, such as the amputation of the hand and public executions.

The conflict between ISIS and the Nusra Front, which has later taken the new name “Hay’at Tahrir al-Sham” (or Organization for the Liberation of the Levant), started to take a different turn; ISIS uprooted members of Hay’at Tahrir al Sham. Fighting between the two parties continued until an agreement was reached between Hay’at Tahrir al Sham and the Syrian Regime in 30 April 2018; it stated that the militants of Hay’at Tahrir al Sham and their families leave the Regime’s areas of control in the besieged Yarmouk Camp, while Regime-aligned civilians leave Al Fuah and Kafriya towns in northern Syria.
The following is a list of the gravest human rights violations committed by ISIS against residents in the Yarmouk refugees Camp since it first took control of the Camp up until April, 2018:

- April 3, 2015, ISIS launched an arrest campaign, which targeted relief activists, journalists and human rights activists from the Yarmouk refugee Camp. Many of these activists were forced to move to neighboring towns, which prompted a number of relief institutions to cease their operations and stop providing services to the residents in the camp.

- During the first week of April 2015, ISIS executed two civilians, cutting off their heads. Three others were killed as a result of bombing of the camp. The names of those killed are: “Jamal Khalifa”, “Abdul-Latif al-Rimawi” and “Mohammed Saleh Issa”. Another individual named “Mohammed Khair Tamim” was killed by an ISIS sniper. Five others were also killed during clashes between militants in the camp. These are: “Majid al-Omari”, “Abdul-lah Hassan Abdullah,” “Omar Khattab,” “Ala Derbas” and “Abdullah Maher Salem”. Sources inside the camp announced the killing of 40 armed members from ISIS.5

- In general, storming the camp by ISIS in the beginning of April 2015 caused the killing of 23 Palestinian refugees during the violent clashes by the Syrian Opposition groups and ISIS, supported by some Al-Nusra Front members.

- The control of the camp and the arbitrary procedures taken by ISIS led to the displacement of around 2,000 families from the Yarmouk refugee camp to neighboring towns.

- August 3, 2016, ISIS closed all schools inside Yarmouk camp and prevented academic staff from practicing their work except through the group.

- November 7, 2016, members belonging to ISIS stormed the Palestine Hospital and looted its equipment.
• February 27, 2018, members of ISIS executed the Palestinian refugee “Moussa al-Badawi” before the Palestine Mosque in Yarmouk camp on charges of spying to Hay’at Tahrir Al-Sham.
• March 2, 2018, ISIS enacted a number of provisions stating whipping of residents in the camp.
• March 6, 2018, ISIS forced all camp students to leave their alternative schools in neighboring towns, which they joined in because they no longer could join schools inside their camp. The excuse was that the curricula dictated to students in schools outside the camp do not meet the principles of Islamic Sharia.
• April 13, 2018, ISIS published photographs of an execution of a Palestinian refugee from the Yarmouk refugee camp, as a punishment for what they called “insulting God”.
• April 15, 2018, ISIS arrested the Palestinian refugee and activist Ayman Douah and released him after 5 days.
• April 16, 2018, ISIS forced all residents in the camp to attend Sharia courses.
• April 23, 2018, ISIS executed the refugee “Khaled Adnan Ahmed” after arresting him from “Al-Qadam district” on charges of fighting alongside the regime army forces.
Abdullah al-Khatib, 29, from the Yarmouk refugee camp, left on the day ISIS officially entered the camp on April 1, 2015, and headed for the town of Yalda, which was then under the control of the Syrian Free Army. In his testimony to Euro-Med’s team, he said that ISIS members closed all schools in the camp, and prevented students from attending them, except those schools belonging to ISIS. Al-Khatib pointed out that ISIS is imposing restrictions on women, including to their right to free movement.

Al-Khatib added that the head of Watad Training Center, Firas al-Naji, was assassinated by ISIS agents while he was entering his home in January 2015. They forced him to kneel and then shot him with a bullet that settled in his head.

Al-Khatib added: “Even my old mother was not left in peace. During the period of ISIS control of the camp, she was able to deliver food aid and treatment to the sick and the elderly who could not move, while on her wheelchair. But the group arrested her in January 2016 while she was on her way to help an elderly person. They confiscated her wheelchair and then released her on the same day, but they imposed house arrest on her.

Al-Khatib pointed to the incident of cutting off the hand of a young man from the camp, aged 18, on charges of theft, which the young man admitted and justified by the poor economic situation.

Al-Khatib also mentioned cases of arrest on charges of communicating with the “Free Army”. This was the case with the young man, “Mousa al-Badaawi.” who was detained for this charge on April 27, 2018. Although he denied
it and stated that he was communicating with family members and relatives who had fled from the camp to areas under the control of the “Syrian Free Army”, ISIS executed him anyway.

Worth noting here is that residents of the camp before the entry of ISIS numbered from 50,000 to 60,000 individuals. They used to lead normal lives, especially in times with less tight siege. However, once ISIS entered the Camp, all daily life activities and movement in the camp almost ceased to exist. Restrictions on civilians were rampant, and ISIS carried out a number of assassinations and arrests of human rights defenders, media activists and others.

Documenting violations perpetrated by members of the Islamic State was a heavy task because of the security grip and repression practiced by the group against the residents. In addition, most activists have already left the Yarmouk camp to neighboring towns to escape the group’s repression of human rights defenders and activists.
Second: 
**The Syrian regime declaring the military operation in southern Damascus**

In practice, the military attacks on the Yarmouk camp did not begin with the military operation launched by the Syrian army in April 2018, but with clashes from time to time against ISIS, which back then controlled most of the Camp’s neighborhoods. Residents in the Camp were unable to provide some of their needs from nearby towns. Some crossings were controlled by the armed opposition factions, and others by ISIS. Both sides controlled the quality and quantity of materials allowed for transfer, which often met only the daily consumption of bread, vegetables and other materials. With the siege imposed by the Syrian army proving effective, soldiers surrounded entrances to the camp, ready to attack. At that time, rumors spoke of attempts to negotiate a settlement between the Syrian regime and ISIS. However, all these attempts have not been successful.

On April 19, 2018, the regime army began a major military operation in the Yarmouk refugee camp and some of the surrounding neighborhoods, such as Al-Qadam and Al-Hajar Al-Aswad, in order to regain control. Despite the heavy shelling of the camp during the first 10 days of the military operation, the forces on the ground advance with a slow pace. The regime thus concluded a Russian-brokered agreement with the Syrian Opposition that allowed the army to enter southern Damascus, Yalda and Babbila and Beit Sahem on April 29, 2018. In return, civilians and military groups following the Opposition were allowed to leave these three town. The agreement became known as The Three Towns agreement.
The most important violations during the military operation

The bombing started to intensify with the beginning of the military operation by the Syrian regime in the camp. The camp was subjected to airstrikes and shelling for 33 days. Photos and testimonies by residents in south Damascus indicated that the Syrian regime used different types of missiles, barrels and explosive hoses.

Activist Mahmoud Abdel Aziz (a pseudonym at his request), is a resident of Yarmouk camp, where he lived until ISIS took control of the Camp in 2015. Out of fear for his life, he left to Yalda village, which is next to the camp, and is under the control of the Syrian armed opposition forces.
During the days of the military operation, he lived in the Camp. In his testimony to Euro-Med Monitor, Mahmoud said:

“At exactly 5:00 pm on April 19, 2018, Russian and Syrian warplanes started bombing several areas of the Yarmouk camp and nearby neighborhoods under ISIS control, with airstrikes nearing 70 per day. On the first day, 50 barrels of explosives, more than 1,000 mortar bombs and 100 surface-to-ground missiles hit the camp. During that period, hundreds of families still lived in the Camp.

According to Abdel Aziz, at that time, there was only one hospital called the “Palestine Hospital.” It was bombed during the third day of the military operation, thus leaving the Camp without any hospital, or even organized ambulance teams. He added that “because of the massive bombing, people couldn’t leave their houses to Yalda town, adjacent to the camp that was controlled by the Syrian opposition forces, which led to the death of many civilians.”
According to several testimonies gathered by Euro-Med’s team, and verified photographs, it seemed that the Syrian army had targeted most of the areas around the Camp where about 3,000 civilians lived under harsh conditions, without power or water. The infrastructure and health centers inside the Camp have also been targeted. For example, Palestine Hospital, the only hospital in the camp which was operating at its lowest capacity, was bombed by several shells that resulted in the death of paramedic “Jamal Samih Humaid” and the wounding of a number of other civilians and patients, according to local human rights organizations and activists in Syria.

The fighting continued with intensity between the Syrian army and ISIS, however without significant results on the ground until it ended with Russian media outlets’ declaration of an agreement between the regime and ISIS. Although the regime initially denied the agreement, what has been dictated was witnessed on the ground days later, when the regime announced its control of the camp.

The military operation resulted in the deaths of 31 civilians from the Camp in addition to the destruction of more than 80% of the camp’s neighbourhoods including schools, infrastructure and mosques, with electricity cut, as well as water.
In his testimony to Euro-Med Monitor, Abdullah al-Khatib, said that “Russian and Syrian warplanes targeted several places in the Camp,” adding that: “Every 30 seconds a missile hit the camp.”

According to al-Khatib, several attacks took place on civilian populated areas, particularly buildings containing cellars, which were used by the residents as shelters. Al-Khatib also said that the Syrian regime sought to destroy the camp, expel residents, and end the Palestinian presence, while “ISIS was a pretext only to achieve this goal”.

“There are no more stones left in the camp, and the whole population has been abandoned with their property stolen. Meanwhile, ISIS leaders have been removed without any injury or harm,” al-Khatib added.
The following are the most important violations committed by the Syrian government forces during their military operation on the Yarmouk camp, al-Qadam and Al-Hajar al-Aswad Neighborhoods.

- On April 19, 2018, paramedic Jamal Samih Hamid, a member of the civil defence staff, was killed inside the Camp, while helping a number of wounded inside Palestine Hospital. He was killed when the hospital was targeted by surface-to-surface missiles, which also caused huge destruction to the hospital, rendering it completely inoperable. The shelling targeted the hospital as part of a series that also targeted surrounding neighbourhoods.

- 27 April 2018, Palestinian refugee “Mahmud al-Bash” and his family (his wife and infant son) were found in the rubble of their destroyed house on Safad Street, which was bombed on 21 April by regime army forces, resulting in total destruction. The family was kept for six days under the rubble without water or food.

- Palestinian families spent 33 days in the camp under difficult circumstances due to the lack of water, food and medicine. In addition, there was a complete absence of civil defence teams, a lack of communication with the outside community due to power and telephone lines cuts, not to mention the absence of activists in the camp because of persecution by ISIS.

- The Syrian regime pressed the Syrian armed opposition factions in the neighboring towns to force them to close all the crossings between them and Yarmouk camp including preventing the residents from long periods of movement through the crossings between the camp and the opposition control areas south of Damascus.
The Syrian armed opposition factions responded to these pressures out of fear that the regime would block its areas on the one hand, and fear of the attack of the elements of ISIS on those towns where the factions of the Syrian opposition in a state of fighting against ISIS.

- Field reports indicate that the regime used surface-to-surface missiles during its military operation in Yarmouk camp and its adjacent neighborhoods, as well as dozens of explosive barrels on residential buildings, causing extensive destruction of buildings. Some reports also referred to the use of the UR77 mine flails by the regime’s army. Some pro-Syrian regime media published video recordings showing one of the UR77 mine flails targeting a neighbourhood in the camp, while also using explosive ordnance that destroys large areas. The explosive belt, which is dropped to dozens of meters, leaves large explosions, while rocket launchers were used to bomb certain areas of the camp with high intensity.

- The main parties in the aggressive operations in the camp, the Syrian regime and members of ISIS, were aware of the humanitarian deteriorating and living conditions in the camp during the period of military operations that targeted it. Despite the launching of many international and Syrian institutions, repeated calls to the regime army to stop the military operations and to open safe routes to save civilians caught between ISIS and heavy shelling by the Syrian government. It includes the United Nations appeal that stressed that the protection of civilians must be a priority for the parties of the conflict in Syria. The appeal issued by UNRWA called for allowing the opening of a safe passage for civilians wishing to leave the camp and adjacent areas and to work for the evacuation of the sick, the wounded and the elderly civilians, and that international humanitarian law must be respected at all times.
The parties, the Syrian government and ISIS forces, did not respond to these appeals and the fighting continued at the same pace.

- The mosques of the Yarmouk camp were heavily damaged. Most of them require extensive reconstruction and renovations. The largest mosques in the camp were destroyed, such as Abdul Qader al-Husseini mosque, the Al-Quds Mosque, Palestine mosque and Al-Waseem Mosque.
A. H., 39, was a resident of the Yarmouk refugee camp, and left for Germany in 2012 (he chose not to reveal his name, fearing the safety of his brothers and relatives in Syria). In his testimony, H. stated that he and his family owned 5 houses in the Yarmouk camp, in addition to 4 shops, all of which were blown up during the last military operation of the regime against ISIS in the camp. The number of missiles and explosives dropped on the camp is enough to blow up a continent, not a dilapidated refugee camp,” said H., adding that: “The removal of 200 to 300 people from ISIS, who were in the camp at that time, does not require all the destruction and displacement of civilians there.

A. H. believes that the goal of destroying the camp is to eliminate the Palestinian presence in Syria. The Yarmouk camp was the largest remaining gathering of Palestinian refugees in Syria. “It was a large four-story house, and each floor consisted of an apartment of about 200 square meters,” recalled A. H.. “My father worked all his life to build this house for us, and now it is no longer home. “There was no stone left in place,” he added.
A. H.’s father was kidnapped by an armed group near the border with Turkey while trying to escape with his daughter from Syria in 2016. The kidnappers demanded a ransom for his release worth $30,000. When the family asked the kidnappers to make sure that their father was safe before giving the money to them, they refused to provide them with any information and the connection was broken. “We contacted all police stations in Syria and they told us that our father could be in a Syrian intelligence prison, but they could not help with any other information,” said A. H..
The displacement of hundreds of Palestinians to northern Syria under the Three Towns Agreement

In early April 2015, after ISIS had taken control of Yarmouk Camp, almost 700 Palestinian families in Syria were displaced to Yalda, Babilla, and Beit Sahem neighboring towns and have settled there since then. However, these families were displaced one more time, but to North Syria due a displacing agreement in the abovementioned three towns.

The agreement was signed in 29 April 2018 by factions backed by the Syrian Regime and the Syrian opposition groups that control these areas, under Russian auspices. It is, in fact, similar to other “reconciliation agreements” that were signed by the Syrian Government in the Syrian armed opposition areas of control and most of which provided for the evacuation of Syrian opposition fighters for north Syria.

These Palestinian families of Syria, who used to be residents of Yarmouk Camp or the three neighboring towns and were then displaced to northern Syria, suffered harsh living conditions, either during the evacuation or afterwards.

On 7 May 2018, the Turkish forces prevented the convoy of the displaced people from crossing and stopped it for five days near Al Bab district in Aleppo. The Turkish forces set up checkpoints in North Syria according to negotiations with Russia. Meanwhile, the displaced people of the convoy suffered harsh conditions, with a shortage of water, food, and medical care.
The families were relocated to several camps to the north of Syria, including Deir Ballut, Shabran, and Azaz, in addition to the camps of Al Bab district. Despite the harsh conditions and the suffering that the displaced lived during the war before their recent evacuation, they found themselves in condition even worse than the previous one. During that period, three cases of death were recorded due to the lack of medical care:

- Mohanad Sakhnini died of a heart attack, with no first aid available to save his life.
- Elderly Abu Aziz Al Shehabi drowned while trying to save a young man’s life in a lake nearby.
- Refugee Omar Aqr died of a heart attack, as well.

In addition, several cases of diarrhea were recorded due to the shortage of water and proper food.

Generally, the displaced of south Syria (those of the three towns, including from the Yarmouk Camp) suffer from a lack of medical care for the people with chronic diseases as well as the shortage of the drinking water and the
water necessary for domestic use. In addition, they face hard challenges to get food, particularly baby milk. Also, rising temperatures have badly affected children, considering that the tests they live in are insufficiently equipped.

Despite its responsibility for the Palestinian refugees in Syria, UNRWA did not provide any aid for them in any of the camps of north Syria. It limits its services to the refugees in the Syrian Regime’s areas of control.

Due to the harsh living conditions that the displaced in north Syria suffer, some took the risk to reach Turkey in unconventional ways, despite the fact that the Turkish border guards- known as the Turkish Gendarme- deal firmly with such attempts.

On 23 June 2018, the child Zain Al Din Zaibaq died by the Turkish Gendarme shooting, while attempting to reach Turkey with his family.
Third:
The Yarmouk refugee camp under the control of the Syrian government - organized looting and field executions

On May 19, 2018, information leaked about an agreement between the Syrian government and ISIS - under the sponsor of Russia to withdraw members of ISIS from south Damascus, including Yarmouk camp. In spite of the denial of the agreement by the Syrian government at the time, eyewitnesses told that they saw members of ISIS withdrawing on buses took them out of Damascus. Meanwhile, many of the agreement provisions remained secret.

In the same context, the United Nations announced the displacement of 400 Palestinian refugees within a local agreement it was not part of. According to the United Nations, the refugees arrived to the northern province of Hama on 22 May 2018.

Following the departure of ISIS members from southern Damascus, the regular army announced on 21 May 2018 that they imposed full control on Yarmouk refugee camp. They ignored the responsibility of property protection, with members of the army and armed factions looting civilians’ houses and shops inside the camp. It appeared from photographs and video recordings leaked from the camp that these lootings were organized, where some members steal the houses, and others collect stolen goods. Despite the scandals of these acts, they did not stop even after the announcement of the deployment of police members in the neighborhoods of the camp on 25 May 2018 by Damascus police chief, Major General “Mohammed Kheir Ismail”.
Euro-Med’s team reported that members of the Syrian army carried out a number of executions against refugees attempting to counter the theft of their homes. Many other violations were reported, which were committed by members of the regime army and other groups loyal to it. The followings are some of the violations that Euro-Med has documented:

- May 23, 2018: The army arrested 20 elderly people who did not leave Yarmouk camp during the war and took them to an unknown destination. Fawzi Hamid and Afif Abu Rashed are were identified to be among those arrested.

- May 25, 2018: The Syrian army executed child Rami Mohammed Salman in front of passers-by near the so-called Tabah checkpoint in Yarmouk Street due to a dispute between him and an officer manning the checkpoint.

- May 25, 2018: The execution of child Mahmoud al-Bakr while trying to prevent members of the regime from looting the properties of his family’s house in Al-Orouba street - Carmel bakery neighborhood in Yarmouk camp.
- Palestinian disabled refugee Issa Yahya Abu Zeid was severely beaten and detained by armed members of the Syrian regime on the pretext of belonging to ISIS.

- A number of houses were set on fire after having their properties looted by members of the Syrian army. Between 1-4 June 2018, a number of houses were burned in the neighborhoods of Lubya, Safad and Al Ja’ouna.

- Despite the repeated appeals by the camp’s residents, the Syrian government did not allow the Civil Defense teams from retrieving the bodies of refugees who died under shelling. On 29 May, about a week after the killing of the Nabulsi family as a result of the bombing by the Syrian army, residents of Yarmouk refugee camp recovered the bodies of five victims using primitive tools.

- Several cases were reported in which members of the regime looted the camp’s infrastructures, such as water and telephone networks. Members thought to be of the Syrian army were seen selling electricity or water supplies, as well as residents’ personal properties.

“Civilians who were displaced from the camp during the military operations had to buy their own property that they left behind in their homes from those who stole it,” said A. S., a refugee displaced to the nearby town of Yalda in his testimony to Euro-Med’s team.
- Several cases were reported about blackmailing residents by members of the army at checkpoints as they tried to enter the camp to inspect their homes. Some of checkpoint’s officers refused to let civilians pass through without receiving a sum of money. Some residents said that they were blackmailed in order to be allowed to carry some of their documents and property out of the camp. Members manning the army’s checkpoints forced residents to pay between $50 to $150 to pass through or to get out some properties, according to a witness interviewed by Euro-Med’s team.
Ahmed Mustafa, 37, as he asked to be nicknamed, left the camp in 2014. He said: “I was in contact with my family and friends in the camp and neighboring towns all the time, especially during the period when the regime announced full control of the camp on 21 May 2018. That’s when my friends entered the camp, and I watched videos showing the organized theft of our homes.”

He added: “The army forced families to pay money in return for being allowed to take the remaining items from the house. My relatives had to pay 80,000 Syrian liras to get some of the items that were in my house. But the most difficult thing was when people of the camp, who were able to get it, saw “Affishah” [a local term used for groups that rob civilian homes] stealing their furniture in front of them.”
Recommendations

- The Syrian government, being the body responsible for the security of the Yarmouk camp, especially after controlling it, must act immediately to control the personnel of its army as well as to stop the organized theft of civilians’ homes and infrastructure in the camp. Furthermore, it should work to return stolen items to their real owners.

- The Syrian government should provide all facilities that ensure the return of families to the camp and that civilians should not be harmed upon return to their houses.

- The Syrian government should ensure that the Civil Defence Teams are provided with all necessary equipment to complete the evacuation of victims’ bodies from under the rubble as well as removing the rubble from the streets of the camp.

- UNRWA should exert all possible efforts to secure the rehabilitation of the important structures of the camp and to provide assistance and assume responsibility of the affected Palestinian families.

- UNRWA should provide basic food and health services to Palestinian refugee camps in northern Syria and provide assistance to its residents, the same as it does with other Palestinian refugee camps in Syria.
- The Turkish government and relief institutions should pay attention to the situation of refugees in the northern Syrian camps by providing their basic need especially health services in the Deir Ballout camp and other camps.

- The PLO, Palestinian factions, UNRWA and the Syrian government should coordinate efforts to rebuild the Yarmouk camp as soon as possible to handle the disaster caused by military actions.

- The Syrian Red Crescent should work with UNRWA to rehabilitate the hospitals of Yarmouk camp and provide them with the needed medical staff.

- The international community should establish a commission of inquiry into the military operation that took place in Yarmouk camp and the preceding hostile incidents by all parties, in order to ensure that those responsible for crimes are brought to justice.

- The United Nations should work effectively to ensure the end of the long-term plight of Palestinian refugees and their return to their homes in accordance with Resolution 194.
References


2 - According to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine (UNRWA) website

3 - ibid.

4 - See: Syria: UNRWA Overview of Hard-to-Reach and Besieged Areas as of 26 April 2018 - Issued by UNRWA

5 - A press conference on the situation in the Yarmouk refugee camp by Euro-Med Monitor, the Syrian Network for Human Rights, and Action Group For Palestinians of Syria - 5 April 2015


7 - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d76ZPNrclkY

8 - https://news.un.org/ar/story/2018/05/1007772


10- UN news release: https://news.un.org/ar/story/2018/05/1009102