



## HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE FOR POPULATIONS LIVING AMONG COMBATANTS: THE POPULATION AT SINJAR MOUNTAIN

### Background regarding displacement on Sinjar Mountain

- According to JEN's<sup>1</sup> recent registration exercise carried out in April 2015, 1,554 families and 10,018 individuals live on Sinjar Mountain in ten different locations. A number of different political groups are established on the mountain, including the KDP and Peshmerga, the PKK, YPG, YPJ and the YBS. During a recent inter-agency mission on 8 December 2015, the Peshmerga and the PKK, along with the YBS, were the most visible among these groups. Numerous pictures of Ocalan exist in various locations. The PKK also were observed to control the check-point leading up to the mountain.
- Preliminary findings from the above-mentioned inter-agency assessment indicated that the population on the Sinjar Mountain is composed mainly of IDPs displaced more than a year ago, as well as host communities. Though most families come from villages both north and south of Sinjar Mountain, some of which are under Peshmerga control, they remain on the mountain to live among relatives participating in different military forces. Approximately 1,157 families are from south of Sinjar mountain, 207 families from the north, and 193 families are considered local residents. Most families on the mountain appeared to contain one or more active combatants, and in one village, the assessment team was told that all households contain weapons.
- The assessment findings suggested that boys and girls were being forcefully recruited by armed groups, in breach of international human rights law and contravention of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Some families reportedly resorted to child marriage to protect their girls, apparently from recruitment and gender-based violence. It was estimated that 1,000 children are out of school. Thirteen of the fourteen primary schools on the mountain were run by the PKK and were not following an official curriculum. Additionally, a significant number of children residing on the Sinjar Mountain have witnessed violence and as a result suffer from psychosocial distress and mental disturbance. Children were reported to have severe nightmares, while others suffered from speech impairments as a result of the trauma.
- Assistance has been distributed on the mountain. Residents received the 1 mn IQD cash grant and 150 liters of kerosene from MoDM. Humanitarian actors distributed winterization items, additional kerosene, children's clothing, and food. In addition, the PKK and other armed groups provided assistance like food rations and tents. Overall, the population appeared to have a higher level of material assistance than other groups in the region. In terms of medical care, there are two PHCs on the mountain, but the female doctor is frequently away treating combatants. There is no mental health and psychosocial support available to children.

---

<sup>1</sup> A Japanese humanitarian NGO

- In view of the above, and based on the inter-agency assessment, the general humanitarian situation in the Sinjar Mountain did not appear critical. The tented accommodation was sufficient, albeit the tents were of varying standards. Shelters looked basic but with some winterization options already available, including extra water proofing and insulation. Access to and from the mountain was also available with families being able to move to Sinuni, access the market and buy basic goods. Some families were also reportedly travelling to Dahuk to collect their PDS. It is expected that the mountain will also remain accessible during winter.

### **Principles for delivery of humanitarian assistance to mixed combatant and civilian populations**

In situations of mixed combatant and civilian populations, humanitarian actors must evaluate whether to provide assistance, and if so, how to do so without compromising the humanitarian principles.

Issues for consideration include:

Humanity: Does the situation require the intervention of humanitarian actors to address human suffering, protect life and health, and ensure respect for human beings?

Neutrality: Is it possible to address the human suffering without taking a side (or being perceived to take a side) in controversies of a political, racial, religious or ideological nature? How can humanitarian actors mitigate the risks that their assistance will not be perceived as neutral?

Impartiality: Do humanitarian actors make decisions on the basis of need alone, giving priority to the most urgent cases of distress and making no distinctions on the basis of nationality, race, gender, religious belief, class or political opinions?

Independence: Can humanitarian action be conducted in a way that is autonomous from the political, economic, military or other objectives that any actor may hold with regard to areas where humanitarian action is being implemented?

Do No Harm: Will the population be targeted if assistance is provided? Can we provide services or assistance safely for both the population and humanitarian actors? Will aid be diverted to armed actors and in essence be viewed as humanitarian support to these groups? Can (or would) these populations instead access services (e.g. health/psychosocial support) in a safer, more neutral location that can be set up nearby?

### **Application of these principles to the Sinjar Mountain context**

The population on Sinjar Mountain has significant needs for protection services and education. The principle of humanity requires a response to address the suffering of children and survivors of gender-based violence, in particular. Safe access to services for women and girls, including reproductive health services, should be ensured.

Relative to other conflict-affected populations in the region, the population has fewer unmet material assistance needs; therefore, in line with the principle of impartiality, this population should not be prioritized for material assistance. Any distribution of material assistance should be narrowly targeted to individuals/families with specific vulnerabilities; humanitarian actors should not provide blanket distribution of material assistance on Sinjar Mountain.

In delivering assistance or services, it is important that humanitarian actors have the capacity to identify vulnerable persons independently of the undue influence of any one particular group on the mountain. Humanitarian actors should deliver assistance/services directly and develop close working relations with multiple local counterparts, representing all groups on the mountain. Humanitarian actors should consider delivering services on a mobile basis

in order to reach settlements controlled by different groups, to avoid the perception that they are siding with one group. If an organization does not have the resources to devote to establishing a strong local presence and relations, it would be advised not to deliver services on Sinjar Mountain where humanitarian actors are likely to be used to further the political or military aims of competing groups.

As the context represents a high risk of diversion of material assistance to military use, humanitarian actors should avoid giving material assistance that could be used to further military goals. Provision of kerosene, for example, should be avoided, unless particular individuals/families have critical needs. Humanitarian actors should not distribute material assistance with visible logos (e.g. on tents, plastic sheeting, etc.) to mitigate the potential damage to the humanitarian actors' reputation for neutrality if those items were to be used in a military context. Organizations that choose to establish offices or distribution points on the mountain should ensure that there is visible notice to the population that persons in military uniform or persons carrying weapons may not access these locations.

*Endorsed by the Humanitarian Country Team on 8 February 2016*