



## **UNHCR POSITION ON RETURNS TO THE SYRIAN ARAB REPUBLIC**

1. Unrest has gripped the Syrian Arab Republic (Syria) since March 2011. The upsurge in violence experienced in the last quarter of 2011 has continued into 2012, particularly affecting the provinces of Homs, Deir al-Zor, Hama, Rural Damascus and Idlib. The ongoing hostilities have had a serious impact on civilians, and are affecting particularly the most vulnerable segments of the population.
2. UNHCR and Governments have registered over 20,000 Syrians who have fled into the neighbouring countries, while over 7,000 asylum applications have been made in Western European countries by Syrians since April 2011. It is understood that significant numbers of Syrians have been displaced inside the country as well. Syria is still generously hosting some 110,000 Iraqi refugees, some of whom have also been displaced by the unrest. UNHCR appreciates measures already taken by Governments to afford international protection to those having fled the country, including in the neighbouring countries of Turkey, Jordan and Lebanon, which have all maintained open borders for those fleeing.
3. As the situation in Syria is fluid and may remain uncertain for some time to come, UNHCR appreciates that Governments have taken measures to suspend the forcible return of nationals or habitual residents of Syria, including those who have had their asylum claims rejected. Such measures are intended to be implemented until the situation in the country has stabilized. UNHCR strongly recommends that States adopt a moratorium on all returns to Syria for the time being, pending an assessment of when the changed situation in the country would permit return in safety and dignity.

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