

# *UN says more than 920,000 displaced across Syria over past four months*

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Geneva, June 22 (RHC)-- The United Nations says more than 920,000 people have been displaced inside Syria during the first four months of 2018, the highest level since foreign-backed militancy began in the Arab country seven years ago.

Panos Moumtzis, the UN regional humanitarian coordinator for Syria, told reporters in the Swiss city of Geneva that Syria continued to witness massive displacements of people over the past few months.

"We are seeing a massive displacement inside Syria ... From January to April, there were over 920,000 newly displaced people," Moumtzis said, adding, "This was the highest displacement in that short period of time we have seen since the conflict started."

Moumtzis pointed out that most of the newly displaced had been forced on the move by escalations in fighting in the former militant bastion of Eastern Ghouta and within the northwestern province of Idlib, which is largely controlled by various extremist groups. His comments came as Syrian government forces seek to flush out militants and wrest full control over Idlib, which has some 2.5 million inhabitants.

At the same time, the mishmash of foreign-backed Takfiri terrorist groups in the province are increasingly fighting amongst themselves. "We worry about seeing really 2.5 million people becoming displaced," Mourtzis said, adding that the UN was currently drawing up a range of contingency plans in case the situation escalated.

"The current composition makes (the situation) highly explosive," Mourtzis warned. He noted that Idlib was part of the "de-escalation" agreement for Syria reached between Iran, Russia and Turkey and warned of the dire consequences if the province sank into full-blown conflict.

UN figures show that the number of people internally displaced in the violence-hit country has risen to 6.2 million. This is while there are still some 5.6 million Syrian refugees in neighboring countries. The UN is currently providing aid to some 5.5 million people across the country each month. But Mourtzis voiced deep concern over the lack of funds for the massive aid operation, with only 26 percent of the \$3.5 billion needed inside Syria this year materializing to date. "The humanitarian response on the ground is really at a breaking point. We are stretched to a maximum," he said. "Our warehouses are empty."

Syria has been gripped by militancy caused by multiple factions and groups since March 2011. The Syrian government says the Israeli regime and its Western and regional allies are aiding Takfiri terrorist groups that are wreaking havoc in the Arab country.

In recent months, Takfiri militants have lost much of the territory they once held in Syria. A conference co-hosted by the UN and the EU in April said that conditions for the return of refugees had not been fulfilled yet, noting that voluntary repatriation might not take place in safety and dignity.

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