

Fifth report to monitor the spread of the Corona epidemic in Syria

April 17, 2020

Even as no confirmed cases of Covid-19 have been recorded thus far, there is a general unease and fear in the northwest and east of Syria about the pandemic and its possible effects on people in the region. There are precautions being taken in the northeast where awareness campaigns have been launched and curfews have been imposed. However, people in the northwest are not practicing any particular precautionary measures, with the exception of organizations working on the ground and local authorities.

This report monitors the general situation of the epidemic and precautionary measures in all Syrian regions during the period of 10-17 April 2020.

First: Northwest:

The Northwest region is considered the most exposed to a possible outbreak of the Coronavirus epidemic which could result in dangerous consequences for the residents. Until the time of this report, no confirmed cases of Coronavirus have been recorded as the results of the total 133 tests conducted were all negative. The procedures in place in the region can be summarized as follows:

- The suspension of work continued in schools and universities in Idlib and its countryside, and the Directorate of Education followed the method of distance education through the creation of groups and rooms on WhatsApp to follow up on students. Prayers in mosques also remained suspended for the second Friday in a row.
- The Ministry of Health in the Provisional Government issued instructions for the medical staff to wear muzzles for the entire period of work and stop anyone not wearing masks from entering to any health facilities.
- Publishing road plates by some organizations in the streets with information on ways to prevent contraction of the virus.
- When distributing relief baskets, some organizations examined the beneficiaries with a thermometer and mandated that beneficiaries maintain a distance of one meter between each other. Several organizations kept up with their activities remotely by conducting awareness-raising sessions and following up on cases through social media.
- Civil defense teams continued their activities in spraying and sterilization campaigns in the city of Idlib and its countryside along with the camps around it. Some organizations also carried out awareness-raising campaigns to prevent an outbreak of

the virus in Idlib, and a statement was issued by northern doctors requesting officials to take strict measures and decisions to combat Coronavirus.

- Some organizations set up tents in hospitals situated in the Idlib governorate to isolate the suspected patients and distributed test kits. In Ata 'clinic in Atme the tent is equipped with a device to check the temperature of the patients and book a role to review the patient through a card.

There are quarantine centers in the northwest, with Scattered tents at each medical point to isolate the patients before referring them to the quarantine center. There are 3 centers in total - one in Salqin in Idlib governorate, one in Darat Azza and one in Al Bab in Aleppo countryside.

Despite all these measures and procedures in place, there is indifference within the camps and in the Idlib region in general. Markets and shops continue to operate normally and social events including weddings and mourning continue to take place. This is due to the poor economic condition of the displaced and other residents in the area who have to completely rely on daily wages to live.

In addition, a large traffic movement was observed at Deir Ballut crossing towards Idlib on the first day of its opening in the absence of precautionary measures. Moreover, delivering financial payments to operating organizations and humanitarian workers is difficult, especially to those based in Turkey due to the partial closure of banks and other logistical difficulties.

Second: North-East regions:

No cases have been officially recorded in northeastern Syria, however there are 60 suspected cases present in quarantine centers according to the statements of the Health Authority in the Gezira Region.

The Medical Administration has received two medical laboratories to help detect the virus from the Kurdistan Territory of Iraq, in addition to medical equipment, devices and medicines provided by the International Alliance.

Tensions continue between the security forces of the Self-Administered and the regime forces due to the regime's breach of the curfew rules and the conduct of almost daily flights from Damascus to Qamishli through the airport. The precautionary measures against the virus were as follows:

1 - Al-Hasakah:

- Extension of the curfew to April 21, 2020 in exception to agricultural professions, pharmacies, and food stores and mandatory fines imposed for anyone who does not comply with the curfew guidelines.
- Allocation of 8 schools and wedding halls as quarantine centers to receive coronavirus patients as well as those awaiting test results
- Ceasing of forced recruitment of the youth by the self-administration
- The Kurdish Red Crescent set up two quarantine tents in Al-Shaddadi, and continued with awareness-raising campaigns including distributing brochures in Al-Darbasiyah.
- The local council formed the Emergency Committee for the Corona Crisis to support the elderly and needy families of Armenians.

The Health Authority of the Self-Administration prepared four buses to transport arrivals from Damascus to quarantine centers. The Internal Security Forces chased down those who evaded the test at Al-Qamishli airport and delivered them to the Health Authority to conduct tests on the incoming passengers at Damascus Airport.

- The Social Affairs Authority announced that it had started distributing food baskets to families affected by the curfew period in the Aljazera region.

2- Al-Raqqa Governorate

Sterilization campaigns in the city's neighborhoods continued with the aim of preventing the virus. Meanwhile, public lighting workshops continued installing

lighting devices and electrical wires to the industrial area in the city. Agricultural and veterinary pharmacies and shops specialized in repairing spare parts for agricultural machinery were allowed to operate even as the Civil Council continued to monitor prices of food supplies and vegetables to prevent merchants from monopolizing the market. Some associations worked to raise health awareness of the virus and prevention methods, and others distributed food baskets to people in need.

3- Deir Ezzor Governorate

No case of coronavirus infection have been recorded which maybe due to the fact that are no laboratories to diagnose cases located in the area. Some suspected cases were diagnosed as pneumonia. On the other hand, there was active movement between the two banks of the Euphrates River, i.e. from the areas controlled by the regime and the Iranian militias to the areas controlled by Qasd, where they are monitored and work to close these crossings by the coalition forces and SDF.

Preparations by the Department of Health of the Civil Council in Deir Al-Zour were limited to sterilizing some villages and towns with disinfectant materials. Meanwhile, the Health Department in Deir Al-Zour countryside was equipped with a single quarantine center (in the Al-Kasra Hospital) with some beds, three Respirator and a limited number of Gas cylinders and protective gear for the medical team.

In coordination with the Organizations Committee, some organizations launched several awareness campaigns, distributed brochures, sprayed and sterilized public facilities while some associations distributed 3000 food baskets in the Al-Jazarat region in the western countryside. Gas stations in the northern and western countryside began distributing gasoline to Motorcycle and cars at a price of 1,000 Syrian pounds.

The local economy, the primary source of income for most citizens, remained semi-suspended due to its dependence on movement of daily commodities imported to the region, in addition to local agricultural products. This caused financial distress for the people as they experienced a complete lack of livelihoods, especially the daily-wage workers and small businesses and other services. Most relief organizations also stopped providing food and health assistance in most areas.

In addition, security conditions remained strained in Deir Ezzor countryside, especially the eastern countryside due to the high level of terrorist organization cells activity in more than one region including daily assassinations, attacks and clashes between members of the organization and the Syrian Democratic Forces which also incited fear amongst the people.

Third - the regime's control areas:

The number of officially declared cases of the Coronavirus reached 33, with 2 deaths as announced by the Syrian Ministry of Health while no information has been released on the specific regions affected by the virus. There was also no information made available on the number of suspected cases. Quarantine continued in the region of Sayyida Zainab's tomb (which is one of the places that are used for religious tourism from Iran Iraq), and the Minin area in Damascus countryside. Moreover, partial curfews continued on normal days, while weekends had total curfews.

The Damascus Hotel has been dedicated for the residence of doctors treating coronavirus patients and suspected cases in order to protect their families in case they also get sick. Meanwhile the Duwair Center has been assigned as the first center of quarantine (it was a center for the Tala'a Al-Baath camp previously). However, some photos and videos have been leaked by its residents about poor hygiene conditions and overcrowding and dearth of suitable equipment. The names and locations of other centers have not been announced and it has been difficult to collect any information in this regard due to the Ministry of Interior decisions to not make any information public or let Ministry of Health to do so in case it creates false rumors and legal accountability for their owners.

There are alarming reports being circulated about increased cases of domestic violence by many organizations and activists in the media. Other problems have also begun to surface due to the curfews imposed in increasing frequency, often due to the high cost of foodstuffs and cleaning materials and corruption by merchants, along with overcrowding in centers of consumer institutions, rising rents of the homes of daily workers, the poor and the displaced whose work has been stopped due to the curfew.

There were also several civil initiatives in the regime areas to distribute food and sterilizers, along with initiatives from the Red Crescent and some of the associations licensed and allowed by the regime to distribute (the largest aid distribution was made through Athar Association to families of the martyrs of the regime army). However, awareness-raising initiatives or other communication on preventive methods has decreased despite a pressing need. Meanwhile, work continued on sterilizing the streets in some areas along with an initiative by doctors and students at the Faculty of Medicine to provide health information and answer queries by the people related to coronavirus through private channels of communication.

The government also announced that from the beginning of next week, it will open some commercial activities for limited hours, to reduce overcrowding, and most of the activities focused on goldsmiths, mobile shops and electrical stores.