



Escalation of Hostilities in Northeast Syria, January 16th 2024

The Northeast Syria (NES) NGO Forum have reported on a series of escalations from October through December 2023, which have all but decimated the civilian infrastructure relied upon by the population of Northeast Syria. **Electricity transfer stations, water stations, gas and fuel plants have been targeted repeatedly.** The most recent escalations have expanded their targeting to include **key access routes** frequently used by humanitarian actors. With power and water infrastructure already critically damaged by October strikes, the current escalation devastated what was left of a number of key civilian infrastructure sites. From January 13-16, 2024, **40 verified strikes** were conducted across Northeast Syria. At least **six civilians have been injured** in this escalation alone, while at least **26 critical infrastructure sites are either severely damaged or out of service.** During the height of the escalation on January 15th, **92% of humanitarian partners providing vital services including health, nutrition, water, sanitation and hygiene reported a restriction of movement.**

The NES NGO Forum calls on all parties to the conflict to immediately cease all hostilities in Northeast Syria (NES), and for the international community to acknowledge the contraventions of International Humanitarian Law occurring in Northeast Syria.

Principles of International Humanitarian Law (IHL) and International Human Rights Law (IHRL) provide for the protection of civilian lives, properties and infrastructures. **Attacks on civilians and civilian objects constitute a breach of Customary IHL, invoking the obligation of other states to bring violations to an end.** The humanitarian response cannot sustain the level of damages increasing with each escalation of hostilities. It is imperative that these attacks are condemned, critical infrastructure repaired and civilian lives protected.

The damage to energy infrastructure caused by this latest round of airstrikes will further degrade civilians' access to water and electricity, beyond the severity sustained by previous escalations. This round saw six power stations damaged, and rendered the critical **Swediyeh Gas Station, serving over 920,000 people, completely non-operational.** **Four electricity transfer substations in Hasakah governorate were taken fully out of service.** Consequently, Alouk Water Station is now completely isolated from the grid, **96 boreholes across the governorate are non-operational,** and 80 boreholes are operating on rapidly dwindling stocks of fuel, threatening access to water for over 815,076 inhabitants in NES. Dozens of facilities that were reliant on the critical services line from Swediyeh - including water stations, health facilities, public bakeries, and other vital services - are now without electricity. More than **38 bakeries in six sub districts are non-operational,** along with a number of silos and mills. Swediyeh was also the only producer of gas in NES, leading to an immediate stoppage of cooking gas production. Targeting of a transfer station in Ain Al Arab lead to widespread loss of electricity in the city, 400 surrounding villages, and 150 villages in Ain Issa. **More than 1 million inhabitants in eleven major cities and towns, as well as over 2,750 villages, and 1900 schools are now fully without electricity.**

The escalations have also led to the suspension of production and distribution of diesel and kerosene, the two most commonly used fuels for heating in winter. **The national oil provider communicated on January 16 that all fuel production and operations are suspended, no fuel is available or being**



distributed, including to AANES facilities. Shortages are already being reported in the Jazeera region, with community generators operating on reduced hours. **Camps were notified on January 15 of an indefinite suspension of delivery of fuel, effective immediately**, leaving camp inhabitants without fuel for cooking or heating either immediately or within the coming days depending on individual camp reserves. Thousands of farmers rely on fuel to operate irrigation and agricultural equipment, further threatening the fragile food security and livelihoods within NES.

With the imminent shortages of fuel projected, and inflation on basic commodities to ensue, communities are at serious risk of being unable to access fuel for cooking, heating, and access to water which could lead to preventable deaths in near-freezing conditions. **Transport of lifesaving goods such as medical supplies and food baskets, as well as powering of key lifesaving facilities such as healthcare centers, and the operationality of life-saving medical equipment**, will also be impacted. Organizations themselves will face increasing challenges to provide much needed support to communities as availability of key resources decreases and costs increase. The scarcity of required resources, heightened operational risks, and safety concerns for both staff and beneficiaries alike are such that **continuation of service delivery by NGOs cannot be assured without a solution for the current constraints, nor if hostilities are to persist**.

The infrastructure damage sustained to date cannot be addressed by the humanitarian response alone. Humanitarian actors are constrained by both limited resources as well as political red-lines. The nature of the destruction requires large-scale infrastructural repair. Meanwhile **the impact of the sustained losses across power, fuel and water sectors cannot be met by those programs already responding to the long-standing needs of the population**.

The NES Forum calls on the international community to negotiate a political solution and end the repeated attacks on vital civilian infrastructure. Investments made into NES and the humanitarian response are being repeatedly undermined and the safety of both civilians and humanitarian actors is increasingly at risk.