

## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

### **Save the Children welcomes the repatriation of 37 Danish and German children from Syrian camps but urges none should be left behind**

**7 October 2021** - Save the Children has welcomed the repatriation by the Danish and German governments of 37 children and 11 women from camps in North East Syria this week but called on Denmark not to leave any children behind as winter fast approaches.

Denmark this week repatriated 14 children and three Danish mothers from camps in North East Syria, many of whom fled ISIS. Germany repatriated 23 children and eight German women.

But Save the Children said it was disappointed that five other children, also from Denmark, were left behind after the Danish government withdrew citizenship from their mothers. It is estimated that around 150 women and children from Germany remain in the camps.

In a report last month, Save the Children [warned](#) that these mothers would face the unimaginable decision of having to allow their children to go to Denmark while they remained behind in the camp.

The organisation is urging governments to repatriate the remaining children along with their mothers and avoid cutting family bonds. Youngsters have told Save the Children that their lives were “simply wasting away” with violence and illness a daily risk in Syrian camps.

Save the Children’s Syria Response Director Sonia Khush said:

*“We welcome the news that the Danish and German governments have taken 37 children out of the miserable conditions they had been living in. Children in the camps face harsh conditions, with limited freedom of movement, inadequate basic services including water and education, and an ever-present risk of violence. As winter approaches, the risk of fires will increase, as people heat flimsy tents to try to keep their children warm. Enduring these conditions, thousands of children are left wondering what is going to happen to them.*”

*“At the same time, it is shocking that the Danish government has decided to leave half of the job undone. Five more Danish children will now be left behind in the camps unless their mothers, who had been stripped off their Danish citizenships, accept for their children to be taken away from them.*”

*“Mothers should not have to choose between staying with their children in camps with such harsh humanitarian conditions and letting go of them where they would have to live on their own. Family ties should not be broken and governments should*

*repatriate members of the same families together. We urge the Danish government to revisit this decision and take these children to safety. Germany must also not forget about the 150 people who are still waiting to go home.”*

Save the Children urges all governments to repatriate their nationals from the Al Hol and Roj camps in North East Syria which are home to about 60,000 people, including an estimated 40,000 children. The dire conditions have been exacerbated by the spread of COVID-19, with a spike of 26% in confirmed cases from August to September 2021 and an ongoing lockdown in both Al Hol and Roj.

About 1,163 children have been repatriated from camps in northern Syria since 2017 with almost 59% of these going home in 2019 in 29 operations. There was a steep decline in repatriations throughout 2020. As of 3 September 2021, about 14 repatriations had taken place this year.

As well as the safe and dignified return of children and their families to their places of origin, Save the Children is calling for expanded humanitarian response in the camps to meet the needs of foreign children while they await repatriation as well as for Syrian children who may remain in the camps for some time to come.