

## NORTH EAST SYRIA: RISE IN KILLINGS TERRIFYING CHILDREN IN AL HOL CAMP, SAYS SAVE THE CHILDREN

AMMAN, 29 June 2022 – A spike in the number of women killed in North East Syria's Al Hol camp in recent months is terrifying children living there, Save the Children warned today, adding some children even saw their mother's body abandoned by the side of a road.

New data showed 21 people had been killed in the camp since April, an increase of 250% from the first three months of the year<sup>[i]</sup>, including 17 women with 8 women murdered in June. This again highlighted that the camp is unsafe for women and children, the child rights organisation said.

The killings come amid an uptick of violence in Al Hol, one of two camps housing people displaced in NE Syria since the collapse of the Islamic State (ISIS) in 2019. Al Hol houses some 55,000 people from Syria, Iraqi and some 60 other countries, more than half of them<sup>[ii]</sup> children.

While the reasons for the killings are unclear, they reveal shocking levels of gender-based violence in the camp where an average of more than two people were killed per week in 2021, making Al Hol, per capita, one of the most dangerous places in the world to be a child.

In one incident, a woman was threatened with weapons and kidnapped in front of her children. Her injured body was left on a road in the camp and was seen by her children.

Her 10-year-old son Ahmad\* told Save the Children: *'I knew my mother was threatened but never expected to see my mother's blood in front of me and not being able to do anything about it.'*

Recent [research](#) by the child rights group found that children are profoundly impacted by violence in the camp. This includes regular nightmares involving violence, insomnia, bed-wetting, vomiting, and losing their appetite. This had led to aggressive behaviour and the inability to concentrate at school. Many of them, including very young children, feel hopeless about their futures. One five-year-old child told his parents that he wanted to die.

One of the mothers, Hadia\*, who took part in this research, was tragically killed last week, Save the Children said.

Speaking to the aid group late last year, she said that her 12-year-old son had witnessed his best friend and his best friend's father shot dead and would ask if they could leave Al Hol whenever there was a murder. They had been unable to leave the camp because their home had been destroyed and Hadia felt she would not be able to find a job or place to live safely.

Save the Children is calling for urgent efforts to support the safe, voluntary and dignified return home of Syrian and Iraqi families from Al Hol. In the interim, donors need to increase support for services for children and families affected by violence, including psychosocial support to help them cope with what they are experiencing.

Matthew Sugrue, Acting Syria Response Director at Save the Children, said:

*"These killings are terrifying the children who live in Al Hol, who are spending their waking hours thinking: "Who will be next?"*

*"We cannot abandon children in Al Hol to live every day fearing for their lives, worrying their family will be the next to be attacked. We must urgently find lasting solutions so that children are able to access the services they need to recover from their experiences. They deserve the same opportunities that all children do- to grow up safely and happily. They cannot do that while trapped in Al Hol."*