Humanitarian organizations raise alarm over attacks on health workers in northwest Syria

14 December 2018, Gaziantep, Turkey - There has been an increase in attacks on health workers in Syrian Arab Republic, according to the humanitarian health organizations operating in northern parts of the country. In particular, reports from the field have shown that kidnapping of health workers, once a rarity at the beginning of the year, has become systematic after the summer of 2018, with an attack reported almost every month. There have been 9 such attacks this year. It is likely other attacks go unreported, as the victims prefer to keep silent for security reasons.

Humanitarian organizations have noted that the majority of reported attacks in recent months have been in northwest Syria, where over three million people are in need of health care services and the attackers are obstructing life-saving interventions. Every attack has immediate consequences for provision of health care including, causing repeated suspension of services in the health facilities, and taking a psychological toll on health workers which impedes their ability to perform their duties.

Northwest Syria has a structural shortage of qualified health workers with only approximately half of the necessary staff to meet the minimum global standard requirements. Increased kidnappings of health workers are having a negative psychological effect on the remaining staff, particularly those working in hard-to-reach places close to the control lines. Any further loss of health workers will mean more health needs remain unmet both in the short and long term.

Humanitarian health partners condemn the attacks and call for all actors of the conflict to respect the sanctity of health care, ensuring the protection and safety of health workers.

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