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Nty [Schlein, Lisa. Millions in Syria have fled homes]

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The Syrian Arab Red Crescent estimates 2.5 million people inside Syria have fled their homes and are in need of humanitarian assistance. The United Nations says the number of displaced could rise to four million people.

- 5 The Syrian Arab Red Crescent is able to move around Syria more freely than other aid organizations, gaining greater access to people caught in areas of combat.

- 10 United Nations refugee spokeswoman Melissa Fleming says the Red Crescent believes its estimate of 2.5 million Syrians who have fled their homes is conservative and that the number of people in need of assistance is probably higher.

- 15 Fleming says five percent of them are living in schools and other public places. The rest are living with families.

- 20 “When they are absorbed in families, it is much more difficult to count and specifically in the Syrian situation,” she said. “We have so many accounts from refugees who have come across borders who were previously internally displaced. They were internally displaced several times before they became refugees So, the people are moving. The people are really on the run, hiding and difficult to count and difficult to access.”

25 The United Nations refugee agency has some 350 staff in Syria, working in Damascus, Aleppo and Hassakeh. Fleming says the UNHCR is trying to provide aid to up to one-half million people inside Syria by the end of the year.

30 She says recent disruptions to operations due to insecurity are hampering these efforts. Over the past few weeks, she says the agency has lost aid supplies due to shelling and other problems. In addition, a truck carrying 600 blankets was hijacked on its way to Adra, outside Damascus.

35 She says staff working in Aleppo also has experienced difficulties. And, she says the UNHCR has been forced to temporarily withdraw staff from northeastern Hassakeh governorate because of a worsening security situation.

40 “We have temporarily withdrawn five staff and seven staff remain,” said Fleming. “Hopefully, we can bring them back very soon and hopefully we can continue our operations. We work also very closely there with the Syrian Arab Red Crescent who continues to serve the people extremely well and to help us aid organizations who have goods and cannot access Syrians in some places. It really steps in to serve as our delivery mechanism.”

45 Despite these setbacks, Fleming says progress is being made. On Monday, she says the UNHCR was able to deliver thousands of mattresses and hundreds of hygiene kits to Aleppo, Hassakeh and Adra.