

## “Hope 3”: Is This the Beginning of the End for al-Hol Camp?



A new group of families arrived in Aleppo on Monday, October 27, from the notorious al-Hol camp in eastern al-Hasakah province. The group comprised 12 families 55 individuals, mostly women and children from the provinces of Aleppo, Homs, Hama, and Idlib.

This was the third convoy of families to leave the camp for Aleppo, coordinated between the Autonomous Administration led by the Democratic Union Party (PYD) and the Syrian government. The transfer was supervised by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) office in Damascus and its Qamishli branch, with logistical support from the NGO Stabilization Support Unit (SSU). The convoy was dubbed “Hope Caravan 3.”

A source from al-Hol camp told Noon Post that most of the families relocated to Aleppo suffer from chronic illnesses such as cancer and kidney failure. They were escorted by the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) from al-Hasakah to Aleppo, where they were received by Syrian internal security forces.

The reception was also attended by medical teams from Aleppo’s Health Directorate, including doctors and nurses, who were equipped with mobile

medical units and ambulances to accompany the families to their new residences. The following day, Tuesday, October 28, several families were transported to their home provinces of Idlib, Homs, Daraa, and Hama.

The source added that several international organizations halted support for al-Hol residents at the beginning of the year, prompting authorities to begin evacuating the most vulnerable cases first.

It is worth noting that this convoy was preceded by two others under the “Hope Caravans” initiative aimed at transferring residents from the camp to areas under Syrian government control.

The second convoy was evacuated on July 30 and included 36 families (127 people) from Homs, Aleppo, and Raqqa. The first group, transferred on June 15, comprised 42 families (178 people), all classified as humanitarian or medical priority cases.

These convoys are part of a broader initiative to close al-Hol camp under the oversight of the US-led international coalition, the Syrian government, and the Autonomous Administration.

The aim is to resolve the issue of internal displacement in Syria. However, the challenge of detention centers and prisons housing ISIS fighters and their families remains one of the most pressing concerns for the coalition, neighboring states, and the nascent Syrian government.

The fate of those leaving al-Hol raises numerous questions. Syrian government statements consistently emphasize the goal of reintegrating returnees into society. Notably, on May 25, Interior Ministry spokesperson Nour al-Din al-Baba announced a shift in camp management policy, describing plans to transform al-Hol “from an inhumane epicenter to a comprehensive social rehabilitation file.” He stressed that these families are part of Syrian society and should not be punished for the actions of a few. He also promised new integration programs to help them become productive citizens.

This appears to be part of a defined government policy to rehabilitate children, empower women to rejoin society, and remove legal barriers against returnees.

The Autonomous Administration and the Syrian government have also agreed on a joint mechanism to regulate the evacuation of Syrian families from the camp. On May 26, Sheikmous Ahmad, head of the IDPs and Refugees Bureau in the Autonomous Administration, said the purpose of this mechanism is to return Syrian families to their areas of origin and end their suffering.

Ahmad also mentioned that a tripartite meeting was held at the camp involving representatives from the Syrian government, the international coalition, and the

Autonomous Administration. The meeting concluded with an agreement on the joint evacuation mechanism.

Located east of al-Hasakah, al-Hol has long been a focal point in international media coverage. The SDF often uses the camp as a bargaining chip, occasionally launching high-profile security raids such as one on September 5, which they claimed aimed “to protect camp residents and ensure humanitarian organizations could continue operating safely inside.”

Al-Hol continues to face dire humanitarian conditions, with frequent smuggling operations. The situation has deteriorated further recently due to reduced support from the United States, which is shifting toward a policy of shutting down all camps that house ISIS-affiliated families.

Washington is also urging countries with citizens in the camp to repatriate them. This is part of a comprehensive plan to reduce military presence in Syria and delegate detention oversight to the Syrian government, in coordination with the SDF.

Originally established in 1991 during the Gulf War to shelter Iraqi refugees, al-Hol was repurposed during the Syrian conflict to host thousands of displaced people from various nationalities. However, since 2019, the camp has seen a massive influx of ISIS families after the group’s defeat by the international coalition and the SDF.

Thousands more were displaced from areas recaptured by the Assad regime and its allies in late 2017, contributing to the camp’s significant population of internally displaced Syrians. Today, the majority of al-Hol’s residents are Syrians and Iraqis affiliated with or suspected of affiliation with ISIS.

The camp currently houses over 30,000 people, including foreign nationals suspected of ISIS ties and their families. Most of the residents are women and children. Approximately 60% are under the age of 18, with most being under 12. Foreign nationals number around 8,500 from over 62 countries.

Iraqis and Syrians represent the bulk of al-Hol’s population. According to available data, Iraq has taken the lead in repatriation efforts, pressured by the international coalition.

Over 19,000 Iraqis have returned through a series of evacuations, the latest of which took place on Monday, October 27, when 249 families about 840 individuals left the camp in coordination with the Iraqi government, the Iraqi Parliament, and the Migration and Displacement Committee.

The buses are heading to the al-Jadaa camp in Nineveh province, accompanied by international coalition forces. This marks the 13th Iraqi convoy to leave al-Hol

in 2025, and the 30th since 2021.

The situation of Iraqis and Syrians in the camp is largely similar: many are merely displaced individuals who fled battles in their hometowns and were labeled as ISIS affiliates without evidence. Many are hesitant to return to Iraq for fear of reprisal.

To support their reintegration, Iraq’s Ministry of Migration and Displacement has launched 78 rehabilitation programs targeting returnees, according to ministry spokesperson Ali Abbas. These programs are part of a comprehensive strategy that includes security screening and ideological and psychological rehabilitation at the “Hope Center” in Nineveh.

During a meeting held on Monday, October 27, Iraq’s High Committee on al-Hol reaffirmed its commitment to repatriating its citizens until the mission is fully complete, according to the Iraqi News Agency (INA).

President Abdul Latif Rashid of Iraq reiterated the country’s goal of closing al-Hol and similar camps permanently, to “cut off the return of terrorism.”

Over the past months, a number of Syrian families have left the camp under local agreements between the Autonomous Administration and tribal leaders in Deir ez-Zor, Raqqa, and al-Hasakah.

These deals aimed to facilitate the return of families to their original communities while ensuring they are not implicated in security issues. Several international organizations have since launched reintegration programs, supporting former residents in starting small businesses and rebuilding their lives.