

Hundreds cross into Turkey from Syria

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(Al Jazeera) - Ethnic Arabs flee Raqqa as conflict pits moderate groups and Kurdish forces against ISIL fighters holding border town.

Syrian refugees camps in Turkey cannot accommodate more refugees, activists say [Reuters]

Hundreds of people have fled from Syria into Turkey as moderate fighters and Kurdish forces battle the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) group holding the Syrian border town of Tel Abyad.

Activists on the Turkish border said that Turkish authorities allowed Syrian refugees in Raqqa province to cross into Turkey on Wednesday after another group of hundreds crossed over to Turkey on June 4.

Since last week, thousands of civilians from northern Raqqa countryside have fled their homes and gathered on the Turkish border because of the ongoing clashes in the area.

Most of refugees sleep in deserted houses or public utility in the Turkish border town of Akcakale in Sanliurfa province because Syrian refugees camps in Turkey cannot accommodate more refugees, according to activists.

A Turkish official said 2,000 refugees were being registered on Wednesday after more than 6,800 were admitted in the area last week, the Reuters news agency said.

He said they were fleeing advances by Kurdish YPG forces as well as aerial bombardment by the US and Arab allies trying to help the Kurds push back ISIL.

Deputy Prime Minister Numan Kurtulmus, who visited the Akcakale border crossing in southern Turkey on Wednesday, where the main influx has been concentrated, said that access would be limited to humanitarian cases only.

"Turkey will not accept entries onto its territory from Syria except in case of a humanitarian tragedy," he said, quoted by local media.

However, a Turkish official told AFP news agency that these measures did not put in question Turkey's open door-policy towards Syrian refugees.

"The restrictions formulated by the local authorities are temporary and local," the official said.

Also on Thursday, an activist group and a Syrian opposition faction said that al-Qaeda's affiliate in Syria, the Nusra Front, killed at least 20 Druze after a confrontation in the northwestern Idlib province.

The killings reportedly occurred on Wednesday in the Druze village of Qalb Lawzeh in the Jabal al-Summaq region, where Nusra Front fighters have dug up historic graves and destroyed shrines in recent months.

The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said the shooting occurred after the Nusra Front tried to confiscate the home of a Druze government official in the village. It said fighters shot one villager dead, prompting another villager to grab one of the fighters' rifles and kill a member of the jihadi group.

The Observatory said the fighters later brought reinforcements and opened fire, killing 20 residents.

Separate zones

ISIL last week launched an offensive on Hasakah city, the capital of Hasakah province, which is divided into zones run separately by the government of President Bashar al-Assad and a Kurdish administration.

The Turkish official said it appeared that all the refugees were Syrian or Iraqi Arabs, rather than Kurds.

"A significant demographic change is taking place in the area. Arabs are being pushed away as Kurds flow in," he said.

Syria's Kurds have sought to take advantage of Syria's complex war to expand their control over a region, stretching from Kobane to Qamishli, that they see as part of a future Kurdish state.

Turkey, for its part, fears that this will encourage separatism in its own, adjacent Kurdish region.