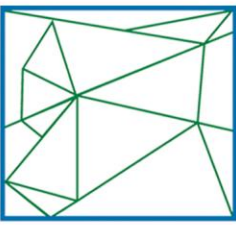


سوريون
من أجل
الحقيقة
والعدالة
Syrians
For Truth
& Justice



February 2018



As If it's Doomsday !

“Fact Sheet on Recent Massacres Committed in Eastern Ghouta that Exposes to One of the Most Brutal and Violent Attacks”



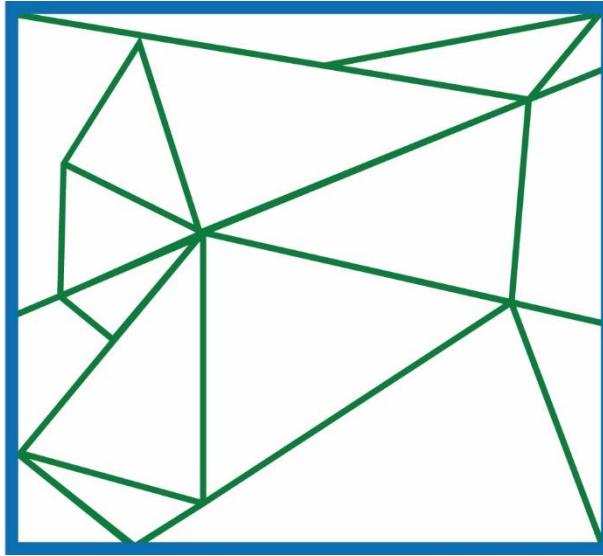
About Syrians for Truth and Justice/STJ

[Syrians for Truth and Justice /STJ](#) is a nonprofit, nongovernmental, independent Syrian organization. STJ includes many defenders and human rights defenders from Syria and from different backgrounds and affiliations, including academics of other nationalities.

The organization works for Syria, where all Syrians, without discrimination, should be accorded dignity, justice and equal human rights.

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"Fact Sheet on Recent Massacres Committed in Eastern Ghouta that Exposes to One of the Most Brutal and Violent Attacks"



Background

As of Sunday, 18 February 2018, Eastern Ghouta cities and towns experienced one of the worst military attacks led by the Syrian government and Russia against hundreds of civilian objects and targets, killing and injuring hundreds of civilians according to Syrians for Truth and Justice/STJ researchers who are there in the area.

STJ, along with other partners (the Syrian Archive- Bellingcat), are conducting expanded and detailed investigations on the most prominent attacks, especially those in which civilians were killed and medical facilities and infrastructure were targeted. The detailed investigations and reports will be published successively when completed.

- **Lethal Attacks Claim Hundreds of Civilians Lives**

The military operations in Eastern Ghouta came as part of the military escalation initiated by the Syrian-Russian alliance on December 29, 2017, which continued practically until the end of January 2018. STJ had issued a detailed report on this escalation titled ([Horrific Massacres by the Syrian/Russian Alliance in Eastern Ghouta, during the Run-Up to Sochi Congress for "National Dialogue"](#)), indeed, this escalation came on the eve of convening the Sochi Congress for "National Dialogue" scheduled on 29 and 30 January 2018 in Russia.

However, this escalation has once again returned to the front and was repeated on 5, 6, 7 and 8 February 2018, when STJ was able to document the killing of at least 200 civilians, as well as the wounding of hundreds more. In this regard, STJ has issued a detailed report under the title ([Unprecedented Military Escalation on Eastern Ghouta in February 2018 Claims the Lives of Dozens of Civilians, Up to 200 Civilians Died during the Days of 5, 6, 7 and 8 February due to Retaliatory Shelling against the Locals](#)).



- **Patients Awaiting Death on "Urgent Evacuation Lists"**

The siege of Eastern Ghouta and the denial of medical material for more than four years has increased the number of patients who need urgent evacuation. STJ had issued a detailed report titled "[Another Use of Sick and Besieged Children and Civilians as a Bargaining Chip in Syria](#)"- "Evacuation Deal between the Army of Islam and the Syrian Government Leads to the Evacuation of 29 Medical Cases from Ghouta in Exchange for the Release of 29 Detainees"). The report detailed the evacuation of 29 patients out of 675 cases from Ghouta in exchange for the release of 29 detained by Army of Islam, the opposition.

As a follow-up to the siege file and the "evacuation lists", STJ has issued another detailed report titled ([Up to 600 Medical Cases Await Death on Urgent Evacuation Lists from Eastern Ghouta- Five New Deaths of Patients Recorded in Eastern Ghouta after the First and Only Evacuation Process.](#)) The report spoke of the death of a number of cases requiring immediate evacuation from the besieged Eastern Ghouta out of hundreds of other cases.

- **Use of Chemicals/Chlorine Gas**

The use of internationally proscribed weapons, such as toxic chemicals, have permeated the recent military operations in Eastern Ghouta. STJ has documented the use of a substance believed to be chlorine on January 13, 2018 **as the first use** of chemical weapons in Eastern Ghouta in 2018, and issued a detailed report on the incident titled ([Exposure of Six Civilians to Poisonous Substances in Eastern Ghouta](#) – Damascus Countryside- "This is the First Attack in 2018 When Chlorine Gas Is Used as a Weapon in Ghouta").

The second use of chemicals occurred on January 22, 2018, when STJ cooperated with the partner, Bellingcat, to publish a detailed report on the incident, and showed the use of German-made materials in the Iranian missile used in the bombardment. The report titled ([Syrian Forces Use Chemical Weapons in Duma for a Second Time in a Month](#)).



Whereas the third use occurred on February 1, 2018, when STJ had cooperated with Bellingcat and published a detailed report on the incident, which showed the use of German-made substances again in the missile used in the bombardment. The report titled (["German-Materials" Again Used in Chlorine Gas Rockets in Eastern Ghouta](#)).

- **Attacks Using Restricted Weapons/Prohibited Incendiary Substances and Cluster Bombs**

The incendiary substances were one of the weapons used by the Syrian regular forces during their military operations in Eastern Ghouta. STJ has documented in a report titled ([Three Consecutive Attacks with Incendiary Substances on Residential Neighborhoods of Harasta City in Late January 2018](#) - the Attacks Coincided with the Launch of "They Were Wronged" Battle's Third Stage in the Military Vehicles Management in Harasta. The report detailed the use of these substances.

The Syrian regular forces have also used rockets loaded with cluster munitions on several towns and cities in Eastern Ghouta on February 2, 2018. STJ prepared a report titled ([Fourteen Rockets Loaded with Cluster Munitions Target Eastern Ghouta Cities and Towns within One day- Violent Attacks Killing Civilians in Eastern Ghouta on February 2, 2018](#)).

- **Suspension of the Educational Process in Eastern Ghouta**

Military operations in Eastern Ghouta suspended the educational process completely in Eastern Ghouta of Damascus. On February 4, 2018, STJ issued a report entitled "[Suspension of Educational Process in Eastern Ghouta due to Recent Military Attacks](#)"- Aerial Bombardment, Artillery Shelling and Poisonous Gases Kill and Injure Students in the Cities and Towns of Eastern Ghouta- Damascus Countryside, the report illustrates the situation of the educational process after the recent escalation.



- **Simultaneous Escalation in Eastern Ghouta, Idlib Countryside, Hama and Aleppo**

It is important to note that the escalation took place in cities and towns of Eastern Ghouta (late of 2017 and early 2018) had coincided with another terrible escalation in several cities and towns in Idlib province, the north countryside of Hama and the western and southern countryside of Aleppo. STJ had issued a detailed report entitled "[Incendiary Substances, Barrel Bombs, Cluster Munitions and Thermobaric Rockets by Syrian/Russian Aircraft Harvest lives of Scores of Civilians in Idlib](#)". The Report Covers the Period from December 25, 2017, to January 20, 2018. The Hospitals and medical facilities in the areas that witnessed the military escalation have been targets of the Russian and Syrian aircraft, denying tens of thousands of medical services. STJ along with (the Syrian Archives- Bellingcat), have issued a detailed report titled ([Six Months On! Medical Facilities in Syria Still Under Fire](#)) on targeting a number of hospitals:

1. The Salam Hospital in Ma'arat al-Nu'man on January 3, 2018.
2. The Odai Hospital/al-Ihsan Hospital, in Saraqib located in Idlib on January 29, 2018.
3. The National Hospital in Ma'arat al-Nu'man on February 4, 2018.
4. Orient Hospital/Kafranbel Surgical Hospital, in Kafranbel located in Idlib on February 5, 2018.

What Happens in Cities and Towns of Eastern Ghouta-Damascus Countryside?

Because of the recent events, STJ prepared this sheet to illustrate the last escalation, based on four separated testimonies (two testimonies are from STJ researchers in Eastern Ghouta and two others are from two activists who monitor the situations).

On February 17, 2018, Syrian regular forces and their affiliated militias had deployed many numbers of vehicles and soldiers in several points adjacent to Eastern Ghouta. According to

military sources, the mobilization was as a part of preparing for the military operations in which “Tiger Forces” affiliated to Suheil al-Hassan participate in order to control the whole armed opposition-held Eastern Ghouta.

The military operations coincided with a statement by Sergey Lavrov, the Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs, on February 19, 2018, when he stated [“The Aleppo experience is completely applicable to Eastern Ghouta”](#).



An image shows some of the devastation affected to the residential neighborhoods of Irbin, as a result of targeting them during the recent military campaign.

Photo credit: STJ



First: Target of Vital Areas in Eastern Ghouta

As of Monday 19 February 2018, (the campaign started on February 18, 2018), the Syrian/Russian forces started bombarding cities and towns of Eastern Ghouta violently and fiercely unprecedentedly according to the people interviewed, the same was confirmed by STJ's field researcher, as he said

"The Syrian regular forces began shelling Eastern Ghouta towns and cities with new rocket launchers being used for the first time on Ghouta, injuring many civilians. On the same day, warplanes launched intensive airstrikes on most cities and towns of Ghouta, using new types of weapons, where infrastructure has been targeted in these areas, such as hospitals, livestock projects and several schools. Moreover, the Syrian regular forces have also targeted one of the most important food stores in Eastern Ghouta, namely "al-Manfoush" stores, in addition to its own bakery, consequently, fire broke out in the stores and many of its main goods burnt. Mesraba town also had the largest share of the shelling on February 19, 2018, causing the displacement of many locals, approximately 4000 family, almost entirely displaced to different areas, including Duma. Those people have displaced under very difficult conditions, because they were not even able to get buses to go somewhere due to the regime targeting of the roads in Ghouta, especially the road linking both Duma and Mesraba."

[A video footage](#) posted by Damascus Media Center showed some of the devastation of Mesraba due to targeting the residential neighborhoods on February 19, 2018.

STJ's field researcher added that most people in Eastern Ghouta are suffering from very difficult humanitarian situations as a result of the recent military campaign, the majority of them had to live in basements that are not equipped for use and they could not go out because of the intensity of the shelling. The researcher pointed out that most shops and markets had been closed, making it impossible to buy food. Concerning the poor medical and educational conditions, he continued:



"Many medical facilities in Eastern Ghouta have been targeted during this campaign, and the medical situation became extremely tragic, notably that Eastern Ghouta was already suffering from a significant shortage of medical materials. Concerning the educational situation, many schools have suspended their official attendance because of the military campaign, besides some schools were bombed, such as "Dawhat al-Amal", a school for the orphans in Mesraba, not to mention the high numbers of civilian casualties that have fallen since the regime began its recent military campaign on Eastern Ghouta. On February 19, 2018, there were up to 100 dead and up to 300 wounded, and the next day, February 20, 2018, at least 114 civilians were killed, 400 civilians were injured, and there were people who died under the rubble and no one could get them out."

Second: Targeting a Shelter in Beit Sawa

In another testimony by Mohammed Khaled, alias, to an activist in Eastern Ghouta, also assured to STJ that many cities and towns of Eastern Ghouta witnessed a bloody day that has never seen before, on February 19, 2018. In this regard, he spoke:

"February 19, 2018 was the bloodiest day, as the regime began shelling most areas of Eastern Ghouta by warplanes and helicopters and threw barrel bombs on almost all areas of Ghouta; there were up to 25 barrels. The regime also targeted a shelter in Beit Sawa and killed 28 civilians who were sheltering inside. In Beit Sawa, the death toll on that day alone was 50 civilians, but in all over Ghouta cities and towns, the death toll reached at least 100 dead, and up to 300 injured. On February 20, 2018, the regime began targeting medical facilities, causing many of them to be out of service, because 12 hospitals and medical points were targeted in whole Eastern Ghouta (the names will not mentioned due to the sensitivity of the situation), in addition, the warplane (machine gun) was targeting the ambulance teams while doing their duty."



[A video footage](#) published by the Civil Defense in Damascus countryside on February 19, 2018, showed targeting Civil Defense teams during the process of pulling out the injured from under the rubble in Mesraba.

"What distinguish this military campaign is the intensity of the bombardment of Eastern Ghouta by warplanes and helicopters that never left the skies, causing total paralysis of the areas," Mohammed said. He pointed out to the systematic target by Syrian regular forces of the vital areas of Eastern Ghouta, such as food depots, public markets and Local Council warehouses. About the difficulty of the current situation, he continued:

"For three days, the inhabitants have been sheltering inside cellars that were not equipped for use, and they have not been able to leave to secure their sustenance because of the intensity of the shelling, and if the situation remained the same, we would witness a humanitarian catastrophe in every sense of the word. Let alone that the number of civilian casualties has exceeded 200, and up to 1,500 people have been wounded since the start of the military campaign."

Third: Large Waves of Exodus

The female STJ's field researcher described the recent military campaign as one of the fiercest to which Ghouta was subjected, illustrating the high intensity of the shelling and attacks on residential neighborhoods, such as Batwana neighborhood west of Duma. The researcher noted that the ongoing shelling of this neighborhood by Syrian regular forces had caused massive displacement of the residents, as it became almost empty. In that connection, she said:

"We can say that the regime follows a gradual policy of displacement of civilians, not only in Duma, but also to the rest of the regions. There is also something to note in this campaign; it is known that the early morning hours from 9:00 a.m. to 10:00 a.m. are considered relatively quiet hours, especially in the previous military campaigns on Ghouta. The people used to secure their necessary food and other services during the time, but in this campaign, the shelling has not stopped all the time, as it was at a high pace, which prompted many people



not to get out of the cellars fearful of being killed. Moreover, the shelling contributed to tightening the siege. It is remarkable that the cellars, where the inhabitants are sheltering in, do not have the minimum conditions of life such as electricity and water. They are cellars not equipped with heating or other means, besides the fact that no party has inspected the conditions of the people and securing their needs in case they were unable to leave the cellars because of the intensity of the shelling."

The field researcher also confirmed that this campaign is characterized by targeting the vital areas of Eastern Ghouta, such as hospitals, schools and bakeries, in addition to medical facilities, despite their scarcity and the unavailability of necessary medical materials. She noted that the Syrian regular forces were targeting all areas simultaneously, which made the Civil Defense and ambulance teams to be surprised of the human damage. She added:

"There is a media and psychological war waged by the regime against the people of Eastern Ghouta, such as news of the regime's intention to use Sarin gas a few days ago, which made the people feel great fear and panic. It has also been remarkable over the past few days that the regime has operated sirens in Dahiyat al-Assad, an area near Duma, before any barrage of rockets fired on the western neighborhoods of Duma, and the aim was to warn the people in that area. The regime was resorting to the use of flash bombs at night, so that to expose civilian gatherings and residential places in Eastern Ghouta and then target them although these gatherings were far from the battlefronts. This indicates that shelling those regions is not an indiscriminate action, but a systematic and deliberate bombardment."

Fourth: Appalling Humanitarian Conditions

In the context of the recent military campaign, most locals of East Ghouta have resorted to basements that are not equipped with different sizes underground. Haytham Bakkar, an activist from Eastern Ghouta, confirmed that, said the cellars were not immune, and might be subject to shelling, and in that connection, he added:



"No water, no electricity nor ventilation holes are available in these cellars; we have spent four nights in these cellars where there is no toilets. On February 21, 2018, one of the basements was shelled, killing five children who were sheltering inside. The bombardment of warplanes and helicopters has not eased in Ghouta since the beginning of the campaign. This is the first time the Ghouta sky is full of this amount of warplanes and helicopters, along with ongoing airstrikes that caused a large number of civilian casualties and destroyed their homes within a record time. Getting out for just finding enough to eat is a suicide because there is a possibility that you may not be able to return as a result of severe shelling. There are some places of random housing where there are no basements, so the locals in these places dig holes or tunnels of 7-8 meters deep underground to survive."





Images provided by the activist, Haytham Bakkar, show how bad the situation is in one of the cellars that shelter people of Eastern Ghouta because of the recent military campaign.

Photo credit: STJ