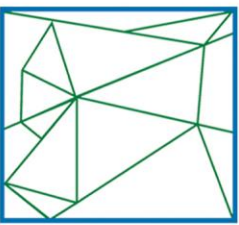


سوريون
من أجل
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Syrians
For Truth
& Justice



January 2018



Beit Jinn Settlement and Unknown Fate Awaits Civilians in Western Ghouta

**“Opening Roads, Access Food and Medical Materials, Removal of
War Remnants and Return Civilians are Undertakings that Syrian
Regular Forces Have not Committed yet”**



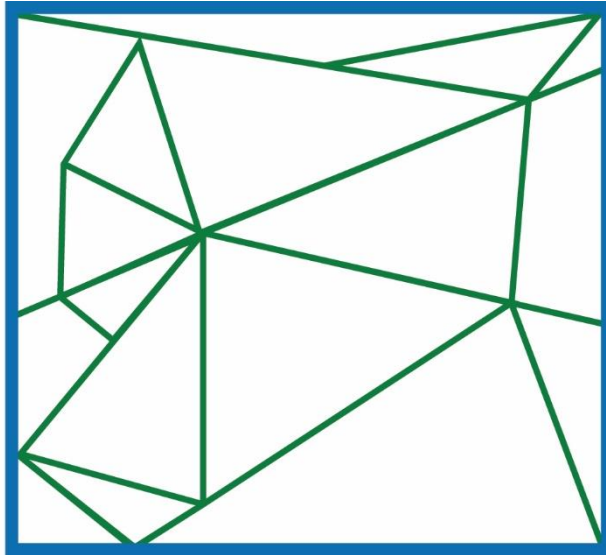
About Syrians for Truth and Justice/STJ

[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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Preface

On January 3, 2018, Syrian regular forces were able to impose their full control over the Beit Jinn area in western Damascus countryside, after [a siege on several villages for more than four years](#), such as [Beit Jinn](#), [Mazraat Beit Jinn](#) and [Mughr al-Meer](#)¹, and that pushed those villages to join settlement agreements² on December 27, 2017, in return for the cessation of the violent military campaign that had begun on those villages on September 2017, in which various types of weapons were used besides the use of military aircraft, which caused civilian casualties and destruction of property as well.

According to several testimonies obtained by [Syrians for Truth and Justice/STJ](#) in late December 2017 and the beginning of January 2018, some of the terms of this agreement were implemented on December 29, 2017, as dozens of combatants of Hayat Tahrir al-Sham/HTS, formerly Nusra Front, and their families along with some other opposition faction fighters, moved towards Idlib and Daraa provinces.

On December 30, 2017, the captives and bodies of the combatants, who had been killed during the recent military campaign on the area, were exchanged, as Syrian regular forces received (10) prisoners and 1 body of one of its fighters, while Syrian opposition forces received two prisoners and four corpses of their fighters.

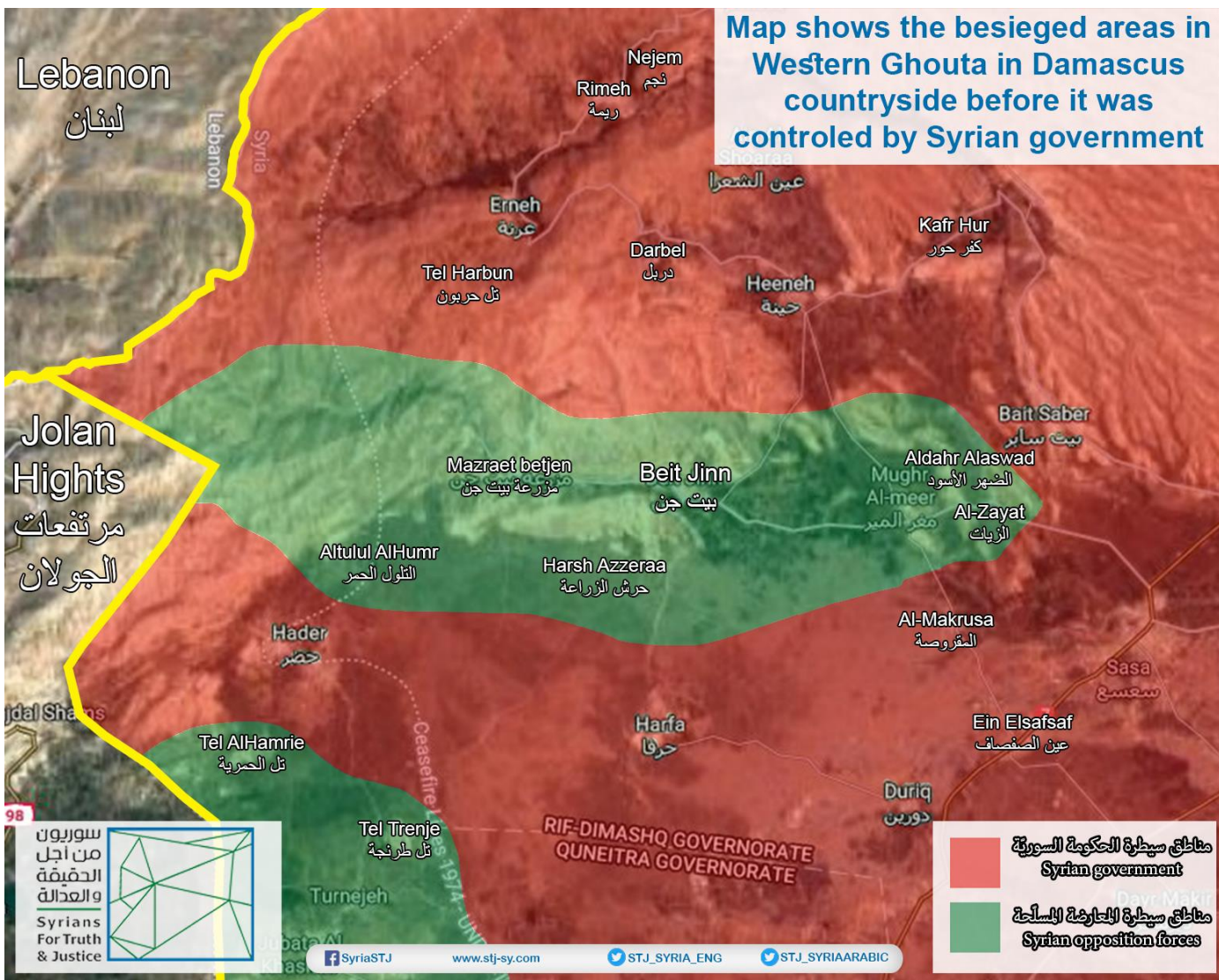
On January 2, 3, 2018, several strategic military positions were delivered in Mazraat Beit Jinn town to the Syrian regular forces, the most important of which (Altulul AlHumer, and Tell al-Louz) on January 7, 8, 2018, the implementation of the terms of the agreement was completed, with

¹ According to Syrians for Truth and Justice/STJ reporter these villages were under the control of the armed Syrian opposition factions, consisting of the Union "Jabal al-Sheikh" forces, which formed at the beginning of 2017, are the result of the Union of six Syrian opposition factions, the most important of which are: Syrian Revolutionary Front and Mount Hermon Brigade Omar ibn al-Khattab and Ahrar al-Sham Islamiyah Movement, as well as other factions such as the Hayat Tahrir al-Sham/AL-Nusra Front.

² "Settlement" means access to a particular type of agreement with Syrian government forces, which includes various forms of items, including the dismantling siege and stop shelling by the regular army and the introduction of foodstuffs and other items, the reconciling items in Syria vary from one region to another and the term The settlement differs from the term "truce or cessation of hostilities or cease-fire", and sometimes in the Syrian context it refers to the neutralization of the area and its subordination to the control of the central government in Damascus.

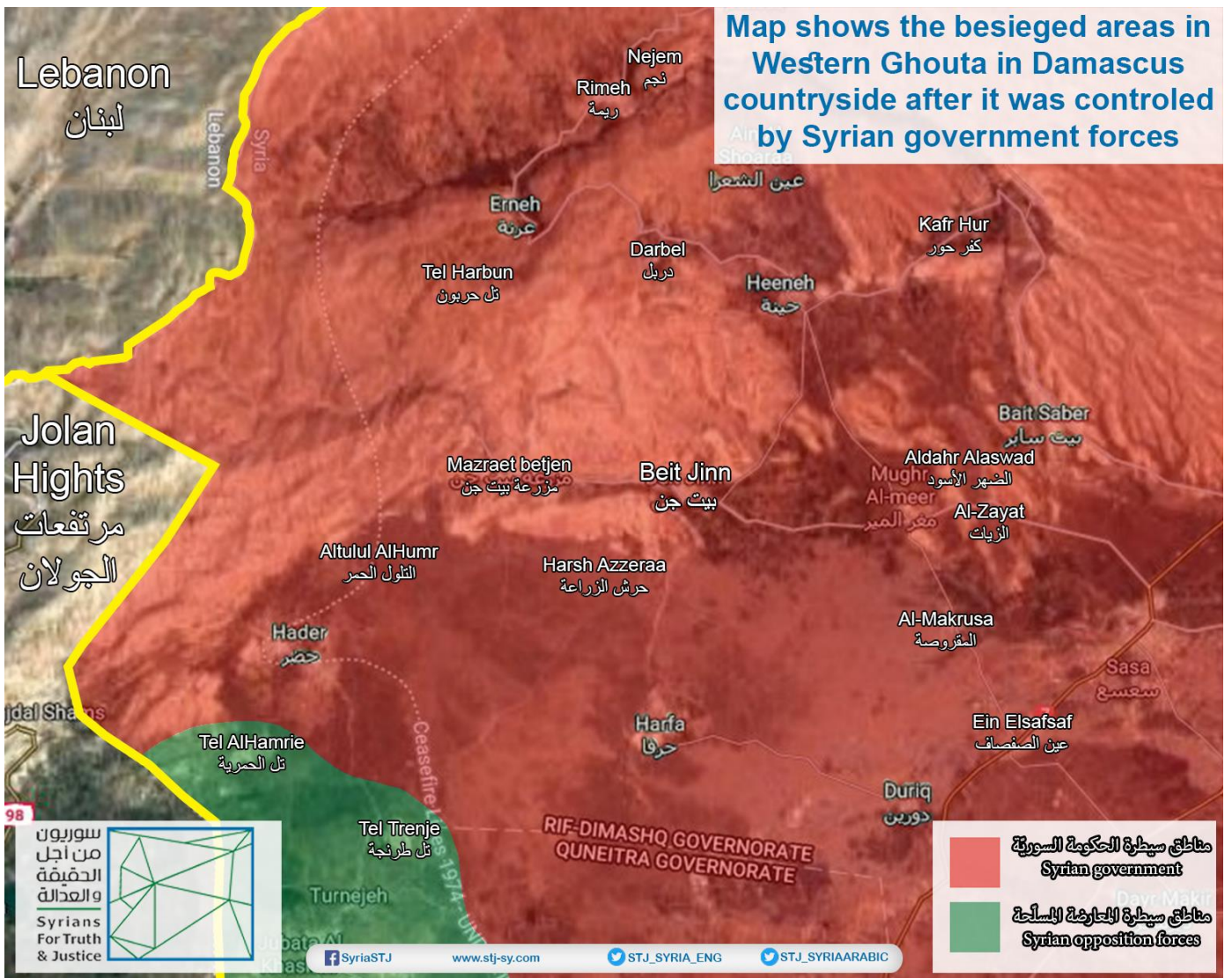
dozens of young combatants from villages of Beit Jinn and Mazraat Beit Jinn to Heeneh the adjusted village in order to "settle" with the Syrian regular forces and undertake to perform the obligatory military service within their ranks.

According to STJ reporter, the Syrian regular forces have not yet adhered to all the terms of the agreement that they had reached without any guarantor party, as it did not permit opening of roads and access to foodstuffs and medical supplies into Beit Jinn area, nor did it allow civilians displaced to return to their homes until writing this report (late January 2017), many of them are fearful of an unknown fate.



An illustrative map showing the besieged areas in Western Ghouta in western Damascus countryside (Before the last Settlement).

Map shows the besieged areas in Western Ghouta in Damascus countryside after it was controlled by Syrian government forces



The latest map of Western Ghouta in Damascus Countryside.



Image shows the devastation in Beit Jinn village in Damascus countryside as a result of shelling it by Syrian regular forces in November 2017, taken on November 20, 2017. Photo credit: STJ



First: The Importance of Beit Jinn Area

The towns of Beit Jinn, Mazraat Beit Jinn and Mughr al-Meer in western Ghouta have a significant geographical location as they overlook the Syrian Golan occupied by Israel, as well as their proximity to the Lebanese Hezbollah-held Shebaa farms located in southern Lebanon. However, with controlling Syrian regular forces on these areas, the western Damascus countryside becomes completely free from armed opposition factions or its anti-jihadist factions.

Second: Days Prior the Settlement Process

At the beginning of September 2017, Syrian regular forces backed by allied forces from villages such as (Hadar, Harfa, Maqrusa³ and Heeneh⁴, commenced a violent military campaign to control the towns of Beit Jinn, Mazraat Beit Jinn and the Mughr al-Meer village, where they resorted to use various types of weapons, as warplanes dropped barrel bombs and rockets in its airstrikes that caused many civilians casualties. Anyway, this military campaign continued until the Syrian regular forces controlled the village of "Mughr al-Meer" after Syrian armed opposition forces withdrew on December 26, 2017. Subsequently, Syrian regular forces became approximately 1 km from Mazraat Beit Jinn.

That resulted in dismemberment of the rest areas under the control of the Syrian armed opposition forces in the town Mazraat Beit Jinn, and Beit Jinn, as they became targeted areas by the Syrian regular forces, "Mughr al-Meer" town is surrounded by strategic hills, all are under the control of the Syrian regular forces such as Bardaya and Al-Thaher Al-Aswad

Following Syrian regular forces military progress, Syrian armed opposition forces agreed entering a negotiating delegation into the town of Beit Jinn to look at the cessation of that military campaign, specifically on December 27, 2017, and in this regard, "Muhammad Omar", an activist from Beit Jinn, said:

³ It is worth mentioning that the village of Hadar al-Maqrusa and Harfa were Druze majority.

⁴ The majority of Heeneh village inhabitants were Christian.



"Beit Jinn area contains number of villages, namely Beit Jinn, Mazraat Beit Jinn, Mughr al-Meer, Beit Saber, Beit Tema and Kafr Hur, as well as a section of the town of Sa'sa." Some of these villages were controlled by armed opposition factions at different stages. However, in 2012, the latter took control of Beit Jinn and Mazraat Beit Jinn, so the area, at that period, became almost besieged and difficult to reach, while Mughr al-Meer was controlled by opposition factions in 2014, and they withdrew from it on December 26, 2017, noting that most of the inhabitants of this town belonged to the Druze community. The idea of reconciliation in the region began when a settlement was held in the Khan ash-Sheh area, specifically on November 27, 2016, and since that time the file of reconciliation widely entered Western Ghouta, and some process began in Hasno region and Sa'sa area, these processes were mediated directly by the Syrian TV producer identified as Kenana Hawijah supported by Russian forces, and subsequently settlements were held in Sa'sa area and then Beit Saber, Beit Tema and Kafr Hur. "

Al-Harmon Regiment⁵ was formed in the wake of those settlements, it was joined by former opposition fighters who had refused to move to Idlib, it also affiliated with the National Defense Centre in Quneitra, as well as it receives direct support from the "Sa'sa Security Branch" affiliated to Military Intelligence Division of Damascus city, Mohammed said:

"After holding these reconciliations, the blockade intensified more and more on Beit Jinn area, in fact, opposition factions controlled only several areas, namely, Beit Jinn and Mazraat Beit Jinn and Mughr al-Meer. Anyway, Al-Harmon Regiment pledged not to attack opposition controlled areas, but Syrian regular forces had already started a military campaign on those areas about four months ago, and the Fourth Division led that campaign under the command of Colonel Ghaith Dallah beside the militia of Fares Forces⁶, headed by Colonel Fares Kreed, and after three months of that campaign, regime made a considerable progress and took

⁵ It was formed at the beginning of 2017, specifically by locals of the Western Ghouta villages whom were settled with the Syrian regular forces such as Beit Saber and Beit Tema and Kafr Hur. It becomes an ally in its attack on besieged areas because they know the region's geography well, and the members of this formation also participated in other battles in Syria alongside the Syrian regular forces.

⁶ It is a force of the Fourth Division of the Syrian Regular Army, which is deployed in the Jabal al-Sheikh area and some towns and cities of Quneitra, with hundreds of combatants from the Druze community.



control of number of strategic hills (Bardaya and Al-Thaher Al-Aswad) Anyway, the failure of the armed opposition factions, to break the siege of Beit Jinn area, was clear, so a new round of negotiations led by the cast, Kenana Hawijah facing opposite five negotiators from the Syrian armed opposition and Hayat Tahrir al-Sham. Indeed they signed a settlement agreement on December 27, 2017, and armed opposition factions withdrew and handed over all their points of control. "

Third: Terms of the Settlement Agreement

According to STJ reporter a delegation of the Syrian regular forces entered Beit Jinn area on December 24, 2017, offering an initiative with only two choices, either surrender or exterminating the whole area, that was after the regular forces took control on a ridge of strategic hills overlooking the town of Mughr al-Meer (Al-Bardaya, Al-Thaher Al-Aswad and Tal Marwan) on December 17, 2017.

Because of this [military pressure](#) Syrian armed opposition forces agreed to concept negotiations, resulting in departure the fighters of HTS /former Nusra Front along with their families to Idlib and Daraa, in exchange for the cessation of the military campaign. They started implementing the agreement on December 29, 2017, and in this regard, Fayez al-Janani-alias-an activist from Beit Jinn, who was familiar with that settlement agreement, said:

"In mid-December 2017, during the violent attack against Beit Jinn area, regime sent several message to the armed opposition factions and demanded to hand over the area, threatening to destroy the area if not, and because of this military pressure by the regime forces, on December 24, 2017, a regime negotiating delegation led by the media Kenana Hawijah and other military figures, agreed to enter into an agreement concerning the exit of the HTS fighters from Mughr al-Meer in exchange for cessation of shelling by the regime forces. Consequently, they commenced the settlement negotiations involving Beit Jinn and Mazraat Beit Jinn, indeed, on December 26, 2017; regime forces [entered](#) the village of Mughr al-Meer after HTS elements withdrew."



Janani continued that the Syrian regular forces delegation had returned the following day, specifically on December 27, 2017, to gather with the opposition delegation, consisting of three military commanders and a spokesman for the "Union of Jabal al-Sheikh force as well as a media activist from Beit Jinn, Janani explained **the items that had been agreed:**

1. *Syrian regular forces restore controlling on several points surrounded Beit Jinn area, such as Altulul Al-Humor and Tal el-Luz, as well as armed Syrian opposition hand over its heavy weapons and part of the medium weapons.*
2. *Regularization of Syrian armed opposition fighters, so that Syrian regular forces guarantee their stay within Beit Jinn and perform the obligatory military service within their villages.*
3. *Exiting HTS fighters and their families, as well as those who would like from the rest of the opposition factions, out of Beit Jinn to Idlib and Daraa, and the fighters of the armed opposition, who came from Daraa and entered Beit Jinn across the Syrian Golan in order to support other opposition factions to return from the same way they came from*
4. *Return the civilians displaced from Beit Jinn area during the period of the siege, and not to be harassed or detained by the Syrian regular forces.*
5. *Reconstruction of Beit Jinn and return of services and introduction of all foodstuffs and medical supplies.*
6. *Pledge by Syrian regular forces not to allow the elements of Harmon Regiment to enter the villages of Beit Jinn and Mazraat Beit Jinn.*
7. *Involvement of all armed opposition agents in a new formation led by "Iyad Kamal" and his alias "Moru", to be affiliated to Division of General Intelligence of the Syrian regular forces, in order to keep the security inside Beit Jinn and its farm.*
8. *Exchange of prisoners and bodies between the two parties.*
9. *Cessation of the military campaign on Beit Jinn if all previous items are approved.*



Fourth. Implementation of the Settlement Agreement

Janini added that the agreement, which reached with no guarantor, contained that those items would be implemented gradually on December 29, 2017, in that connection he continued:

"On December 29, 2017, ten buses entered Beit Jinn along with number of ambulances and cars belonging to the Syrian Red Crescent [transferred elements of HTS](#) with their families to Daraa and Idlib, directing four buses with 94 persons, 60 were armed men from HTS and 5 were armed men of the opposition, directed to Idlib, while the rest were families of the displaced armed men. Six buses and two ambulances directed to Daraa with nearly 165 people including 80 armed from HTS, while the rest were families of armed displaced. And it is remarkable that all the fighters of HTS who came out of Beit Jinn, had entered it from neighboring areas, such as (Qatana, Hasno and Sa`sa), some of those fighters were Lebanese and Jordanian, and only five families were originally from Beit Jinn."

Janini noted that on December 30, 2017, prisoners and bodies of the fighters, who had been killed during the last campaign, were exchanged in Beit Jinn, as Syrian regular forces received (10) prisoners, most of them were combatants, and one body while Syrian opposition forces received two prisoners and four bodies of their fighters, on January 2 and 3, 2018, several strategic military sites in Mazraat Beit Jinn were handed over to Syrian regular forces, the most important are [Altulul Al-Humor](#) and [Tell al-Louz](#), Janine added saying:

"On January 7 and 8, 2017, the implementation of what was agreed upon was completed as dozens of young fighters from Beit Jinn and Mazraat Beit Jinn headed to Heeneh, a near village, in order to make a settlement, as they signed a pledge not to carry out any " terrorist "operations again, with the indication to not protest Syrian regime in the future, they were given promises to perform compulsory military service within Beit Jinn and Mazraat Beit al-Jinn.



Fifth: The Syrian Regular Forces have not Committed its Undertakings

" Syrian armed opposition has implemented all the items that have been agreed upon, in return Syrian regular forces haven't not committed their undertakings as a whole, particularly concerning opening roads and introduction of food and medical materials, nor did they allow displaced civilians to return to their homes, and no teams entered to rehabilitate the infrastructure that had been completely destroyed as a result of the violent shelling over four years by Syrian regular forces, in this regard, " Salem Moayad, from Mazraat Beit Jinn village, spoke to STJ saying:

"During September 2017, I managed to take my wife and child out of Beit Jinn to Beit Saber, in order to protect them from the threat of the recent military campaign that conducted by regime forces on Beit Jinn. Anyway, Syrian regime presented several promises during the settlement procedure, including opening roads and return civilians whom fled the region as a result of the war, but this has not yet been done, as there are many houses that have been destroyed or partially damaged, beside many missiles fired by regime forces and they still exist among civilian houses without exploding, and the electricity net is still malfunctioning, There are no signs that the Syrian regime is serious about reforming all of this, and we have no idea who can compel the regime to fulfil all his undertakings and commitments agreed upon at the end of 2017, and what is our fate in case regime forces decided to share them in the battles against Syrian opposition forces in other parts of Syria. "



Image shows an unexploded missile among civilian houses in Beit Jinn in western Damascus countryside, taken on November 25, 2017.

Photo credit: STJ