

**Statement Regarding the Military Escalation against the Civilian Areas of
Eastern Ghouta
“Tens of Civilians Killed and Wounded as a Result of Aerial Bombardment and
Shelling”**

On 15 November 2017, Syrian regime forces and its allies embarked on a series of brutal attacks on areas of Eastern Ghouta, in which crowded civilian places such as public markets, schools, and residences were targeted. Weapons used carried incendiary material and included cluster bombs among others.

This is despite the fact that the guarantor states of the Astana peace process - Russia, Turkey and Iran - had signed a memorandum of understanding on the 4th of May 2017, under which several “De-Escalation Zones” were established across Syria including areas of: i) Eastern Ghouta in Damascus countryside, ii) Idlib governorate along with adjacent parts of Lattakia, Hama and Aleppo, iii) an area in northern Homs countryside, and iv) a stretch of territory in southern Syria.

The memorandum asserted, among other articles, on enforcing a cessation of hostilities, and allowing the delivery of humanitarian aid and medical supplies in the aforesaid areas. On July 22nd 2017, the Eastern Ghouta based armed opposition group Jaish al-Islam signed this de-escalation agreement. The co-existing (in different areas within the Eastern Ghouta enclave) armed opposition group Failaq al-Rahman joined in signing the de-escalation agreement on August 18th 2017. Despite the fact that this agreement covers Eastern Ghouta, the bombing and shelling of this area continued over the past years and the siege was not lifted. Thus, the armed opposition group Ahrar el-Sham (also co-existing in different areas of Eastern Ghouta) announced a military campaign named “That They Were Wronged” on November 14th 2017 aiming to seize control over the Armoured Vehicle Military Base in Harasta.

During this last military campaign by the regime forces, no less than 9 schools were bombed in the areas of Misraba, Erbin, Kafarbatna, and Duma. Those attacks killed at least 5 children (students) and wounded many others, while completely destroying the infrastructure of those schools. On November 27, 2017, the Syrian air-force targeted a public market in the city of Duma, in which 7 civilians were killed and tens were injured. On the same day, airstrikes also targeted a public market in Misraba.

It is worth mentioning that Syrian regime forces intensified their imposed siege of Eastern Ghouta as of April 2017, closing all routes leading to the enclave. The number of those besieged in this area amounts to 367,075 people. The aid convoy entering Eastern Ghouta was on 12 November

2017, and it carried around 4,300 food rations, sufficient only for 25,000 families for no longer than five days.

In addition, the last aid convoy entered on 28th November with a limited amount of supplies and malnutrition medications. According to sources, this amount will be distributed to 7200 people in need in Al Marj area.

civilians in are living in dire and extremely difficult humanitarian conditions, with the absence of any life subsistence, an imposed siege, and a devastating inflation of food prices (if available).

As a result, civilians besieged today in the Eastern Ghouta are living in extremely difficult humanitarian conditions and suffering from the lack of the basic living supplies, in addition to soaring food prices if any was to be found. This threatens widespread malnutrition among civilians, especially children.

We, the undersigned organisations, strongly condemn the outrageous siege on the cities and towns of Eastern Ghouta, and demand the complete lifting of the siege and the immediate entry of humanitarian aid to this area. We demand that UN organisations and the UN Security Council commit to their responsibilities in that regard, and take all necessary actions to immediately end the targeting of civilians and residential areas by all parties of the conflict, and guarantee the safety of all civilians including those targeted by mortar shells in the capital Damascus.

Signed Organisations:

1. Baytna syria
2. Dawlaty
3. Emissa
4. Fazaa
5. Hurras Network
6. Local Development and Small-Projects Support (LDSPS)
7. PÊL- Civil Waves
8. Rethink Rebuild Society
9. Syria Civil Defence
10. Syrian Center for Media and Freedom of Expression-SCM
11. Syrian Network for Human Rights-SNHR
12. Syrians for Truth and Justice-STJ
13. The Day After (TDA)
14. Urnammu for Justice and Human Rights
15. Violations Documentation Center in Syria-VDC
16. Women Now