

Unprecedented Military Escalation on Eastern Ghouta Killing Dozens of Civilians in February 2018

More than 200 Civilian Deaths Fell within 5, 6, 7 and 8 February Due to Retaliatory Shelling Against Locals

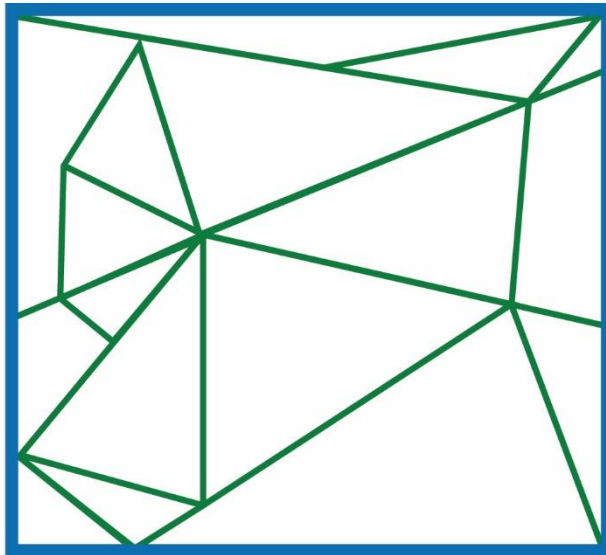
About Syrians for Truth and Justice/STJ

[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

Several cities and towns in the besieged Eastern Ghouta witnessed an unprecedented military escalation by the Syrian regular forces and their allies (Syria-Russian alliance), from 5 to 8 February 2018, where the latter used various types of weapons in shelling those areas, by military aircraft or artillery shelling, leaving numerous casualties dead or injured, especially after targeting residential neighborhoods and popular markets.

The field researcher of Syrians for truth and justice/STJ confirmed that the shelling of many Eastern Ghouta cities and towns coincided with the increased fighting between Syrian regular forces and the Syrian armed opposition factions, where the densely populated areas were shelled by Syrian regular forces and their allies, in order to inflict the greatest number of civilian casualties, and to put pressure on the armed opposition factions and people who support them. January 2018 saw a large number of massacres of many civilians, but since February 5, 2018, the allied forces escalated their systematic shelling of residential areas, with more than 200 military air raid on Eastern Ghouta between 5 and 8 February 2018, which resulted in more than 240 civilians casualties, mostly women and children.

STJ field researcher noted that the massacres committed that period can't be counted owing to its large number, explaining that the people of Eastern Ghouta had never witnessed such a hysterical campaign of systematic shelling.

The field researcher of [STJ](#) added that the death toll on February 5, 2018 alone was 36 civilian deaths from various cities and towns of Eastern Ghouta. On February 6, 2018, the death toll rose to 91 civilian deaths, and on February 7, 2018, 42 other were killed, while on February 8, 2018, 75 civilians killed besides more than 1250 others who were injured during that period.

It is worth mentioning that this escalation coincided with Ahrar al-Sham al-Islamiyya Movement's announcement of the third stage¹ of "They Were Wronged" battle, which it was lunched on January 28, 2018, when Ahrar al-Sham al-Islamiyya Movement blew up a ditch of the regular Syrian forces within the Military Vehicles Management in Harasta city, which resulted in the death and injury of a number of Syrian regular forces fighters.

This dramatic escalation came several days after the "Syrian National Dialogue" congress, held in Sochi on January 29, 30, 2018, which [its most prominent outcomes](#) were the formation of a constitutional committee comprising the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic delegation along with wide-represented opposition delegation for drafting of a constitutional reform and the calling for democratic elections.

First: Dozens of People Killed, Including Children, as a result of Targeting Residential Areas and Popular Markets in Eastern Ghouta:

Since **February 5, 2018**, the shelling began with targeting Outaya town with mortar shells, and that was followed by warplanes bombardment on a number of Eastern Ghouta cities and towns, and of them (Irbin, Harasta, Hamoryah, Ein Tarma and Duma), leaving a number of deaths and injuries among civilians. However, the bloodiest massacres was in [Beit Sawa](#)² village, which occurred at 10:00 a.m., when Syrian regular forces warplanes targeted the village's popular

¹ This campaign started on November 15, 2017, following Ahrar al-Sham al-Islamiyya Movement's announcement of its three-stage battle "They Were Wronged" in order to control the "Military vehicles Management", held by the Syrian army, in Harasta. The first stage began on November 14, 2017, in which the fighting resulted in the kill of a number of Syrian regular forces fighters along with the control of Ahrar al-Sham al-Islamiyya Movement on large portions of the Military Vehicles Management base in Harasta. while the second stage began on December 29, 2017, in which the battles led to impose siege on Military Vehicles Management by Ahrar al-Sham al-Islamiyya Movement, in addition to the latter's control of Al-Ajami neighborhood, the Automated oven, and Al Hadaeq neighborhood, which stretches along the road between Harasta and Irbin from the west side of the Military Vehicles Management.

² Beit Sawa village is controlled by the al-Rahman Legion.

market with five highly explosive rockets, killing 10 civilians and injuring 20 others. STJ's field researcher has documented the names of the dead in that massacre, they are:

1. Manal Misto
2. Amina Amarah
3. Ahmed Juma'a (a child)
4. Muhammad al-Sabbagh (a child)
5. Ahmed Hamdan
6. Emad Qarqouz
7. Dia'a al-Aati
8. Ala'a Fatian
9. Yaseen al-Shalit
10. A dead man from al-Aghawani family

[Video footage](#) published by the Civil Defence in Damascus countryside showed the panic and horror among civilians in Beit Sawa village, following the aerial bombardment on February 5, 2018.

On **February 6, 2018**, [Duma](#)³ city was shelled by Syrian regular forces warplanes, dropping three high-explosive rockets on residential neighbourhoods in the city, one of which hit a building of several floors, burning it to the ground, and causing the deaths of 10 civilians, including women and children, and the injury of dozens. In this regard, Muhammad Fawaz, one of the paramedics who rushed to the scene of the attack, said:

"At 11:00 a.m., a distress call was launched to the ambulance crews in Duma city, to head to a residential building which had totally collapsed over the heads of its inhabitants. Upon arrival there, I shocked with the massive destruction. We started the rescue operations, and we managed to pull out three people alive, two children and a woman, from under the rubble, who suffered severe fractures. The building was inhabited by two families, the majority of them women and children, 10 of whom killed and the rest were seriously injured. I still

³ Duma is controlled by Jaysh al-Islam.

remember how they were suffering from pain and shouting for help, and that's what gave us courage and more determination to get them out. We worked for hours and their voices were gradually gone, but we kept trying to remove the rubble for 12 hours and our operations continued until we reached them, but unfortunately, they were all dead" .



Some of the child victims who died as a result of shelling residential building in Duma city, on February 6, 2018, ©[Douma Coordination](#),





Exclusive photos for STJ showing the building were Duma 26th of February 2018 massacre took place



A side of the devastation caused by the bombing of a residential building in Duma city, on February 6, 2018. ©[Duma Coordination](#),



Some of child victims who died as a result of shelling a residential building in Duma city, on February 6, 2018, ©[Duma Coordination](#),



As STJ field researcher confirmed, 22 civilian deaths were documented, as a result of shelling a number of residential neighbourhoods in Duma city on February 6, 2018. Some of the dead identified are:

1. Bilal al-Nisreen (9 year child)
2. Bashar Salim Diab (8 year child)
3. Ahmed Itani (12 year child)
4. Hana'a Yaseen al-Da'as
5. Najwa Tayseer al-Najjar
6. Mu'mina Khaled al-Shaghri
7. Waheda Eidawi Mustafa
8. Eman Labania
9. Bayan Labania
10. Layan Ibrahim Dalwan
11. Rudaina Dalwan
12. Ola Kibreta
13. Khadeeja al-Sheikh Bakrie
14. Malak Muhammad Ghazei
15. Abdel Rahman Arbash
16. Marwan Omar al-Halbouni
17. Muhammad al-Dalati
18. Hisham Abdel Rahim
19. Ma'moun Mahmoud al-Barnawi
20. Husain Hamou
21. Omar Asa'd al-Barzawi
22. Omar al-Tout

On **February 7, 2018**, the Syrian regular forces bombed Duma city, targeting the most densely populated street in it known as "al-Quwatli", which was confirmed to STJ by Hassan Aybur, a native of Duma, saying that the street mentioned is completely free of any military presence, he continued:

"At 11:30 a.m., I was in my house when a warplane threw a rocket on the building, injuring my daughter and a neighbour was killed. Five minutes after the raid, the warplanes returned and throw another rocket near us on the same street, injuring many civilians mostly women and children who were hiding inside their homes, and that was followed by a state of fear and terror among the people, especially since the warplanes did not leave the sky of Duma that day. We could not do anything but wait for death. The scene which is still vivid in my memory since then, is for a little girl who was taken out of the rubble, and she kept saying, "Leave me and go back to save my parents".

Second: Six Civilians Killed in Shelling Residential Block in Kafr Batna Town:

Syrian regular forces and its allies' shelling has not spared [Kafr Batna⁴](#) town, as on February 6, 2018, four rockets were fired at once on one of its neighbourhoods, known as "al-Dirak". In this regard, "Muhammad Kharbatli", a resident of Kafr Batna, spoke to STJ saying:

At 11:30 a.m., Russian warplanes targeted al-Dirak neighbourhood with four rockets at once, which resulted in the death of six civilians and serious injuries to dozens. Among the dead there were (the child Rabie Rihan, Hassan Eid Taqalji, Khaled Mahmoud Shaker, Abdel Hakim Ataya, Ahmed al-Rajjal and Emad Muhammad Khair al-Marji). Five minutes later, the warplanes targeted another block in the town, but the people had taken precautions after the first raid, as they went down to cellars and shelters, which was greatly reduced injuries."

⁴ Kafr Batna town is controlled by the al-Rahman Legion.

Muhammad said that the second raid which targeted a residential block in Kafr Batna town, led to the total destruction of a kindergarten along with a Teachers' Union school, and the completely getting out of service of four buildings, as well as some casualties among civilians, Muhammad Saying:

“We can no longer tolerate, even mountains cannot endure what we suffered that day, and we could not understand what is happening around us and why we are killed this way.”

[Video footage](#) published by Ghouta Media Centre showed a side of the treatment given to a number of victims who had been injured by shelling Kafr Batna town on February 6, 2018, as well as the extensive destruction of civilian property.

Another [video footage](#), published by Kafr Batna Coordination, said that it shows the initial moments following the air raids on Kafr Batna town on February 6, 2018.



Some of the victims injured by shelling Kafr Batna town on February 6, 2018 .©[Kafar Batna Coordination](#),



Third. Appalling Massacres in Hamoryah and Jisreen:

[Hamoryah](#)⁵ city had a share of the shelling, which had been carried out by the military aircraft of the Syrian regular forces and its allies, where at 10:30 a.m. on **February 7, 2018**, warplanes launched aerial raids targeting residential neighbourhoods, resulting in the total collapse of residential buildings, and the kill of 11 civilians, mostly children.

On February 8, 2018, military aircraft re-targeted an inhabited area in the city, which houses a residential square and a popular market. Muhammad Tu'meh, a native of Hamoryah city, who spoke to STJ, confirmed that saying:

At 2:40 pm, Russian warplanes launched an air raid on the city, during which several high-explosive rockets were dropped on a populated neighbourhood and a popular market, which has caused a large number of casualties among civilians, mostly women and children. Many houses have got out of service as a result of shelling, that entire buildings were destroyed and their residents became homeless. The death toll of this attack was 6 civilians, including (the child of Abu Salah Ataya, Ismail al-Qaseir, Muhammad al-Masri, the two young men Wasim Abdel Jawad and Tayseer Abdel Jawad, as well as Ahmed al-Shummali) Knowing that the city is purely civilian and there is no military presence in it."

[Video footage](#) circulated by activists, showed the first moments of targeting residential neighbourhoods in Hamoryah city on February 7, 2018,

Another [video footage](#) published by Damascus Media Centre showed a side of the injured evacuations following the shelling of residential neighbourhoods in Hamoryah city on February 8, 2018.

⁵ Hamoryah city is controlled by the al-Rahman Legion.



According to STJ's field researcher, 8th of February 2018, was a bloody day, as the Syrian regular forces and their allies' airstrikes were not stopped, targeting several areas such as (Irbin, Jisreen and Beit Sawa). [Jisreen](#)⁶ village had the largest share of shelling, as it was targeted by two aerial raids at 11:00 a.m. on the same day, and in each raid more than one high-explosive rocket was dropped on residential neighbourhoods in the village, which caused 17 deaths, including women and children, in addition to dozens of injuries. In turn STJ's field researcher documented the names of the dead in this massacre, they are:

1. Muhammad Amir Darwish(a child)
2. Noura Darwish(a girl child)
3. Sami al-Hindi (a child)
4. Nadwa al-Wadi
5. Ina'am al-Tunisi
6. Fatima al-Diabi
7. Nouma al-Dumani
8. Shaliba Dalla
9. Muhammad Saleh al-Bashash
10. Mahmoud al-Bateh
11. Mustafa Kaboush
12. Ahmed Darwish
13. Mahmoud Darwish
14. Waleed al-Tunisi
15. Mathhar al-Najjar
16. Salam al-Najjar
17. An unidentified man

[Video footage](#) published by Damascus Media Centre, showed the first moment of the bombardment of the warplanes on Jisreen on February 8, 2018.

⁶ Jisreen village is also controlled by the al-Rahman Legion.



STJ had earlier [prepared a report documenting horrific massacres](#) by the Syrian/Russian alliance, in Ghouta during the period from December 29, 2017 to January 20, 2018. STJ had also documented in a [previous report](#), on February 2, 2018, the shelling of a number of residential neighbourhoods in Eastern Ghouta by rockets loaded with cluster munitions.
