

Onslaught on Eastern Ghouta Constitutes Genocide & Crimes Against Humanity

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Press release
Syrian Coalition
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The Damascus suburb of eastern Ghouta has been under tightened siege for the sixth year running. At least 1.7 million of its inhabitants have been displaced as a result of a ferocious onslaught targeting populated areas, infrastructure, hospitals, schools, and public markets. These attacks resulted in a catastrophic situation in eastern Ghouta with the UN Secretary-General describing it as “hell on earth.”

Since 2012, as many as 23,000 civilians have been killed in eastern Ghouta as a result of relentless attacks by the Assad regime and Russian air forces as well attacks by the Iranian terrorist militias. In the past three months, more than 2,000 civilians were killed and 5,000 others injured. Furthermore, 32 hospitals and health centers have been destroyed, including the health center in the district of Beit Sawa, the Rahma medical center, Jubar Hospital, and Arabin Hospital which have all been put out of service because of the bombings. Even underground shelters are no longer safe. We recall here the massacre that took place in Beit Sawa as offering the starkest example of this genocide as the massacre claimed the lives of over 42 children and women.

Russia is leading the bombing campaign, using the Humemim airbase as a center for the management of its military aggression. The Iranian-backed militias prevented UN aid convoys from entering eastern Ghouta, causing a catastrophic humanitarian situation and severe shortages of food and medical supplies. The Syrian Interim Government (SIG) and local councils announced that the emergency response decreased to below 30% of the minimum requirements.

Eastern Ghouta was covered by the ‘de-escalation zones’ agreement which was confirmed at the Vienna meeting on December 26. The Free Syrian Army groups committed to the agreement, which was violated by the Assad regime and Iranian terrorist militias with Russian cover. The barbaric bombing campaign, in which bunker-buster bombs, vacuum bombs, incendiary napalm, toxic chlorine gas, and barrel bombs are being used, has resulted in total destruction of human life in eastern Ghouta. Only 400,000 people remained in eastern Ghouta, including hundreds of patients and those with urgent medical needs.

The failure of the international community to punish perpetrators of crimes against humanity, including the crime of the use of chemical weapons in eastern Ghouta in 2013 claiming the lives of over 1,400 civilians, and the subsequent use of chemical

weapons in three attacks since the beginning of this year together with allowing Russia to provide a cover-up for criminals have all led to horrifying increases in the scale of war crimes.

Based on these events, and following accusations by the Russian UN ambassador to the White Helmets rescue group of being linked to terrorist groups during the UN Security Council meeting on Wednesday, and in light of the massacres taking place in eastern Ghouta, we now do not have the slightest doubt that a genocide is systematically being carried out in eastern Ghouta by Russia, Bashar al-Assad and Iran. Russia is obviously intent on punishing the Syrian people for not succumbing to the Russian plans in the Sochi conference.

Based on the above, the Syrian Coalition emphasizes the following:

1. Russia is a key party to the conflict in Syria after it intervened against the Syrian people. According to the United Nations Charter, States that are parties to a conflict are not entitled to vote on draft resolutions at the UN Security Council. All draft resolutions on Syria at the Security Council must be presented to challenge Russia. Thus, the UN Security Council will not remain disabled by the Russian veto.
2. What is taking place in eastern Ghouta is genocide and crimes against humanity in violation of International Law and International Humanitarian Law. The perpetrators bear full responsibility for this and should not be allowed to escape punishment under any circumstances.
3. Russia bears direct responsibility for this situation given its full involvement in the military effort and bombing operations and its prevention of the UN Security Council from taking the necessary measures to stop the bombings and deliver relief aid.
4. The deadly behavior of Russia and its allies serves only transnational terrorism and terrorist groups. The targeting and weakening of the Free Syrian Army plays right into the hands of terrorist groups operating in full coordination with the Assad regime and moving around with support from Hezbollah and Iran's terrorist militias.
5. The Syrian Coalition calls for the enforcement of Article 21 of UN Security Council resolution 2118 to punish those responsible for the use of chemical weapons in Syria under Chapter VII of the UN Charter.
6. Russia ignores the fact that the Syrian people and the Free Syrian Army are victims of terrorism and were at the forefront of forces fighting terror. The use of the fight against terrorism as a pretext to attack eastern Ghouta is illogical as it ignores facts on the ground let alone seeking to undermine all international efforts to make peace in Syria under the auspices of the United Nations.

7. The Coalition calls on the UN Security Council to shoulder its responsibilities towards the people of eastern Ghouta and demands that the United Nations hold a special session of the General Assembly for this purpose. The Coalition categorically rejects Russia's attempts to disrupt the mechanism of international justice. We also do not accept that the UN Security Council continues to sideline the Syrian people as it allowed the Russians and Assad's ambassador to tell a web of elaborate, barefaced lies and unsubstantiated allegations while the Syrian people are not given a chance to express their grievances in front of the world.
8. The Coalition salutes the heroic resilience of our people in eastern Ghouta and the bravery of the Free Syrian Army fighters in defending their people and their land. The Coalition reiterates its unwavering support for the FSA at all levels as it endeavors to provide all the requirements of standing up in the face of the aggression on the Syrian people.
9. The Coalition calls for an immediate end to the siege of eastern Ghouta and for holding accountable the Iranian and other militias involved in the siege of the Damascus suburb. This siege is clearly aimed at forcing the local population out of their homes and brining about a demographic change in favor of the sectarian, racist Iranian regime. The Syrian people are sacrificing their blood to confront this sectarian project and protect the entire region, not just Syria.
10. The Coalition calls on the Syrian, Arab and friendly communities around the world to demonstrate and hold sit-ins in front of the Russian embassies until the aggression is stopped and the crimes of the aggressors are exposed to the world public opinion and international human rights organizations.