

Syria: War crimes amplify suffering of Eastern Ghouta's bombed and besieged civilians

Amnesty International

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Relentless aerial bombardment and shelling by Syrian government forces is magnifying the suffering of civilians trapped under siege and facing an escalating humanitarian crisis in Eastern Ghouta, said Amnesty International in a new report published today.

(...)

“For nearly three years the lives of civilians in Eastern Ghouta have been devastated by bloodshed and tragedy. They are trapped and surrounded by fighting on all fronts with no means to escape the unlawful aerial and shelling attacks waged by government forces. Their anguish is compounded by dwindling supplies of food, clean water and other crucial necessities which mean that daily life for many has become a prolonged experience of hardship and suffering,” said Said Boumedouha, Acting Director of Amnesty International’s Middle East and North Africa Programme.

(...)

Between January and June 2015 Syrian government forces carried out at least 60 aerial attacks on Eastern Ghouta killing around 500 civilians. The report documents 13 air strikes and other attacks amounting to war crimes, which killed 231 civilians and only three fighters. In 10 cases no military target could be identified in the vicinity suggesting the strikes were direct attacks on civilians or at best indiscriminate. In the remaining three cases the attacks appeared grossly disproportionate or otherwise indiscriminate.

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Public markets are also on the list of Syrian government’s targets. “It was a disaster,” one eyewitness said describing the aftermath of the attack on the market in Kafr Batna on 5 February. Residents said the attack took place at 1pm– the “busiest hour of the day” - and also destroyed two nearby residential buildings. There was no trace of a military target nearby.

In a similarly shocking attack on 25 January Syrian air force jets bombed a market in Hamouria shortly after Friday prayers as crowds of people poured out of a nearby mosque to buy sugar sold that day at a discounted price, killing more than 40 civilians. (...) Syrian government

forces also repeatedly fired imprecise rockets and mortars or unguided bombs into populated areas in a series of direct and indiscriminate attacks on civilians amounting to war crimes.

(...)

In addition to daily bombardments, living conditions for civilians of Eastern Ghouta have continued to deteriorate. Residents have limited access to food, clean water or medical care and essential supplies including electricity and fuel. Checkpoints controlled either by government forces or armed groups restrict their movements into and out of Eastern Ghouta. Government forces have also denied UN agencies and other humanitarian actors free access to the area.

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The report discloses that non-state armed groups, particularly the Army of Islam, are guilty of an array of abuses including abductions, arbitrary detentions and indiscriminate shelling. Their use of imprecise weapons such as mortars and Grad rockets in populated areas amounts to war crimes.

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The Security Council must urgently impose targeted sanctions against all parties to the conflict in Syria responsible for war crimes and crimes against humanity as well as an arms embargo on the Syrian government. The Syrian government should ensure unfettered access for the Independent International Commission of Inquiry to the country as well as other human rights monitors including Amnesty International.

Read the full report

[here](#)

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