



SIEGE AND DEATH IN EASTERN GHOTA

2nd Version | March 2018

Siege and Death In Eastern Ghota

Background:

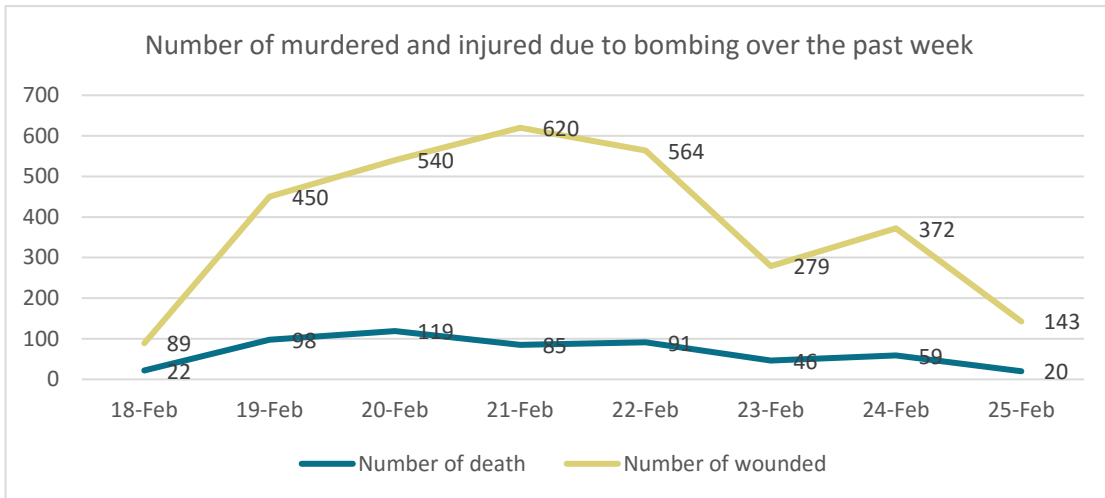
For the past four years, the Eastern Ghota has been under siege. On October 23, 2012, after liberating most of its sub-districts from the regime's control, a blockade was imposed on the area since October 2013 by the regime. And then the Eastern Ghota has become under the scourge of this siege, which whoever was somewhat partial; as the opposition was able to filter in some food items from the Damascene Burza neighborhood through underground hand-dug tunnels. Noting that the regime used to allow foodstuff entry into Burza in accordance with an understanding made among the military factions affiliated with the opposition controlling the Burza neighborhood and the regime. The food items were passed through the tunnels from the Al-Kabon neighborhood, which separates the eastern part of Damascus from the Damascene Burza neighborhood. Some foodstuffs were also sneaked through some regime-affiliated traders through Alwafideen Mohkaiyem crossing to the Eastern Ghota. However, the price of the foodstuffs entering the Eastern Ghota by traders were very much exaggerated, while the items coming from Alwafideen Mohkaiyem were most of the time subject to embargo by the regime. More or less, the items sneaked through Burza contributed in slightly relieving the siege and the exaggerated prices imposed by the regime. On February 18, 2017, the regime launched military aggression to force in Jober neighborhood under its control with a view to separate the neighborhood of Burza completely from the Eastern Ghota. An act that makes it easier for the regime to thrust into Burza neighborhood and controls it. At the same time, this would enable the regime to completely cordon off the Eastern Ghota and prevents the entry of all materials into the area. The regime's attempts, however, went amiss and this had prompted the regime to storm into the Damascene Burza neighborhood and control it completely, thereby preventing the entry of any food items into the Eastern Ghota through the tunnels. In March 2017, the IMU of the ACU, issued its report "The humanitarian Situation in the Eastern Ghota"¹ singling an alarm about the dire humanitarian situation that civilians would face if the regime managed to enforce a strict siege on the area. Nevertheless, on 15 November 2017, the regime escalated its vicious military actions, in an attempt to storm into the Eastern Ghota from its western side, through a regime-based facility so-called Military Vehicles Complex. In December 2017, the IMU of the ACU issued its first version of the subject title report "*Siege and Death in the Eastern Ghota*"², reflecting the devastating escalation waged by regime and its collaborating allies on the Eastern Ghota and the most urgent humanitarian needs people in the area are in want for, under the deadly siege imposed by the regime.

Situation on Ground:

The regime has again started its escalating military aggressions against the Eastern Ghota on February 18, 2018, preceding it with mobilizing its forces in the Dhameer military airport. The number of victims killed within 8 days from the start of the aggressive campaign reached 540 people dead, with 3057 injured.

¹ <https://www.acu-sy.org/en/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/ACU-IMU-Eastern-Ghota-March2017-EN.pdf>

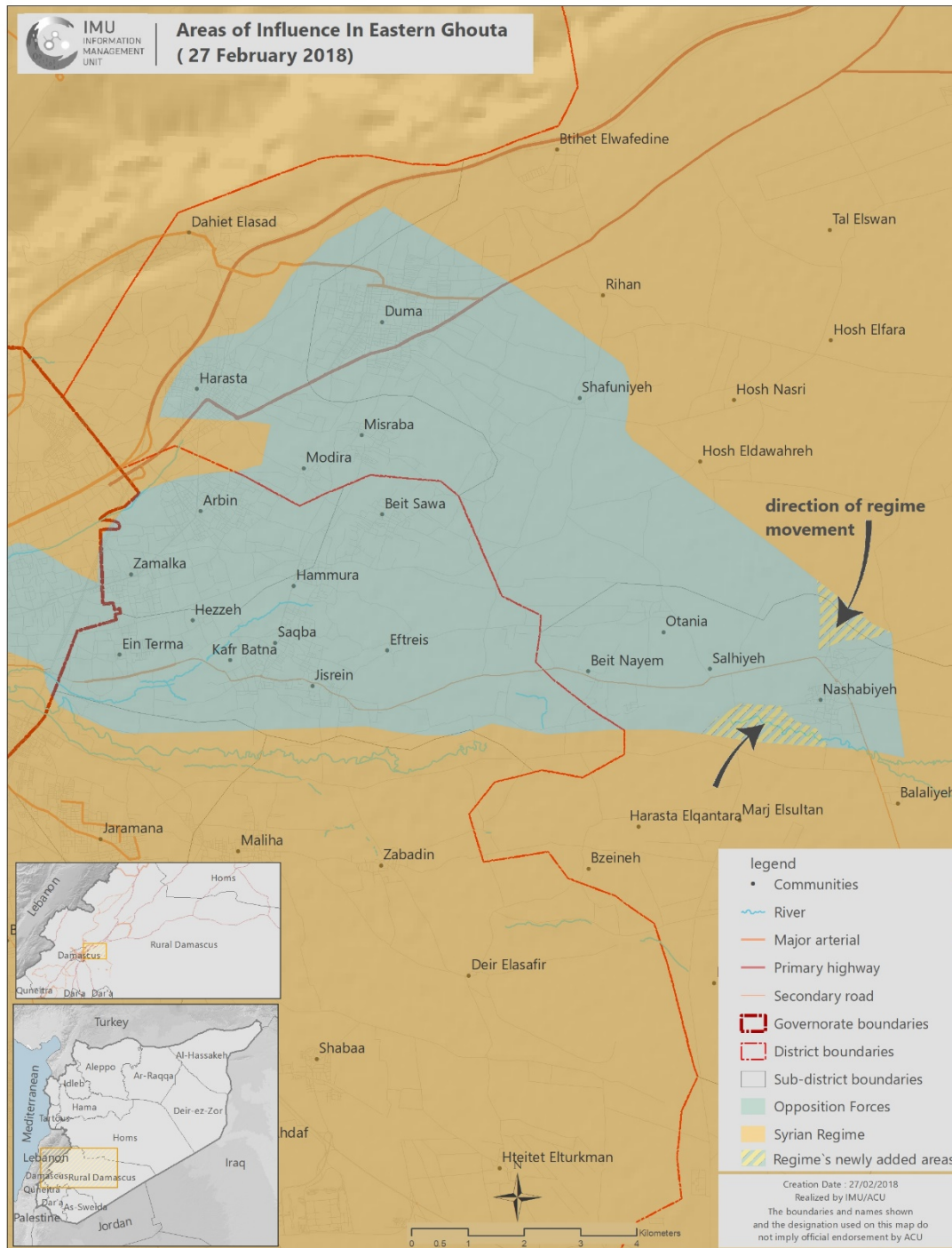
² https://www.acu-sy.org/en/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Eastern-Ghota_Dec-2017_Eng.pdf



On February 20, 2018, the Duma city was targeted with toxic gases. An act that left tens of people suffocating. On the next day, February 21, 2018, the IMU of the ACU enumerators, documented the regime and its collaborating allies targeting 9 medical facilities and centers, 4 of which were rendered out of service completely. Added to this, a Red Crescent center was targeted and was completely destroyed, whereupon a civil defense officer was also killed, and several others were injured. That was during their rescue work and their pulling survivals trapped in the rubble. On the following day, February 22, 2018, the regime further escalated its aggression and attacked the city of Duma with the internationally banned weapon, napalm, inflicting large number of victims receiving severe burns.

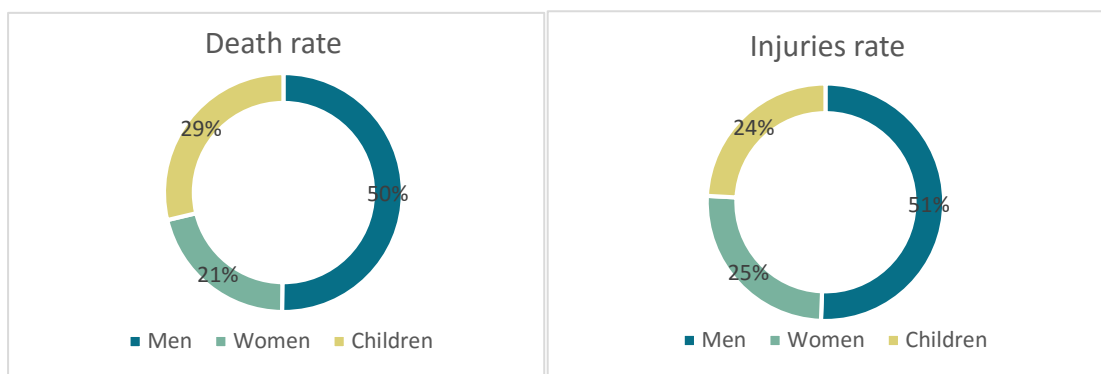
Notwithstanding the fact that the Security Council was able to pass a ceasefire resolution proposed by the Kuwait and Sweden on February 24, 2018, the regime continued its targeting the Eastern Ghota. 59 people were reported killed on the same day, and 20 slaughtered next day, on February 25, 2018. The regime’s military warplanes targeted the town of Shafuniyeh in the Duma sub-district with toxic gases, resulting in the death of 4 years old child and 19 cases of suffocation. Noting that, the reason behind the reduced number of deaths and casualties during the past two days, as shown in the previous graph, is far from indicating a drop in the intensity of bombardment imposed by regime; it is rather attributed to the fact that the besieged people are taking refuge in the undergrounds and observing the alarm messages sent by the sky-watchful-eyes network, which significantly contributed to the reduction of casualties; as the alerts are communicated few minutes before the deadly raids open their fire.

The regime and its collaborating allies seem to be trying to encircle both of the Nashabiyeh and Hazrama towns and separate them from the Eastern Ghota, in a first step bid towards executing a massive displacement from the Eastern Ghota.



Healthcare Situation:

Statistics show that 540 people are documented dead, 50% men, 21% women and 29% children; while the number of wounded reached 3,057 cases, 51% men, 25 % women, and 24% children, as reported by the Health Directorate affiliated to the opposition.



It should, however, be noted that the number of victims does not represent the actual total number; as there is still an unknown number of bodies trapped under the rubble. The Civil Defense teams are said to have not been able to pull out all bodies from under the rubble due to the severe shelling and bombardment and the lack of equipment to remove the wreckage. A situation that leaves no choice for the rescue worker but to search for the survivals still buried underneath.

Victims /Injuries	Victims	Degree of Injuries		
		Little	Medium	Severe
Men	271	786	408	353
Women	114	430	189	153
Children	155	449	158	131
Total	540	1,665	755	637

During the past 8 days, 806 surgery operations have been performed in the medical facilities in Eastern Ghota, according to statistics reported from the besieged area. The majority of which are orthopedic and general surgeries; something which open eyes to the urgent need for the provision of orthopedic surgery requirements such as external retentive devices, plates, bars and surgery kits, as well as related consumables. This is in addition to the urgent and pressing need for anesthesia drugs as well as antibiotics and medicines. Failure to provide necessary equipment and medicines may lead to an increase in limbs amputations cases, and the complications that would follow such operations; especially in case the aggressive escalation remains running wild in the besieged area. The earlier version of this report contains a detailed listing of the basic needs that the medical facilities are in want for.

Work is being coordinated with the Nutrition Working Group, operating under UNICEF’s supervision in Gaziantep, Turkey, to deliver high-energy biscuits used extensively and effectively in emergency cases. In the meantime, mothers are supported to continue breastfeeding their babies and to secure baby formulas in special situations, in accordance with relevant work standards and in cooperation with specialist doctors. Accordingly, it becomes a must to provide additional amounts of these supplements to the rural areas of Damascus urgently.

Type of Surgery	Men	Women	Children	Total
Orthopedic	152	59	56	267
General	126	58	52	236
Vascular	42	17	11	70
Pulmonology	16	6	5	27
Urology	9	3	2	14
Reconstructive	35	21	20	76
Ophthalmic	17	11	5	33

Neurosurgery	21	2	5	28
Upper limbs amputation	4	1	1	6
Lower extremities amputation	4	-	1	5
Mandibular	5	1	1	7
Otolaryngology (ENT)	16	11	10	37
Total	447	190	169	806

Eastern Ghota and UN Resolution:

The regime and its collaborating allies seem to be attempting to frustrate any UN resolution that would safeguard the civilians in Syria from the continued killings, besiege and displacement. On February 14, 2018, an international aid convoy consisting of 7 trucks loaded with 100 tons of foodstuffs entered the Eastern Ghota. The last aid convoy allowed to enter the area dates back to November 2017. At that time, only one phase was implemented out of several attempts to distribute aid to the people trapped in the enclave. It should also be noted that the assistance provided on February 14, 2018, may only be sufficient to 5% of the residents and for just one month. The regime seems to have picked up a deceitful timing to consent the entry of just a small amount of aid ahead of the UN session addressing its blockade of the Eastern Ghota in order to foil convening that meeting.

Despite the regime and its collaborating allies procrastinating the referendum on the truce proposed by the Kuwait and Sweden for several days, on February 24, 2018, the UN passed the its draft resolution No. 2401; albeit after having been devoid of its effective content, according to which "*an immediate resolution be taken by the Security Council to stop the hostilities in Syria, lift off the siege enforced on besieged areas, and facilitate the entry of the humanitarian assistance.* ", as the resolution has been amended to read "*Demands that all parties cease hostilities without delay*"³. Nevertheless, under the pretext of the presence of extremist terrorist groups, the resolution excluded a number of areas from bombardment; something which allowed the regime and its allies to continue bombardment of the areas controlled by the opposition. In fact, the regime is looking at all areas beyond its controls as being extremist terrorist groups.

In a move from the United Nations to ensure that all parties in Syria comply with the announced truce, the Secretary-General of the United Nations was mandated to report within 15 days from February 24, 2018, on compliance by all parties with the UN resolution.

On February 27, 2018, in a fabricated made up footage, the regime filmed several Syrian Red Crescent vehicles stationed at the crossing of the Mohkaiyem Alwafideen crossing, a passage way connecting the areas controlled by the regime and that of the opposition's. This was in the background of the Russian forces declaring a daily ceasefire from 9:00 a.m. to 14:00 p.m. for the civilians to exit from the area. None has been reported to have left as yet, as on the date of this report. This daily fire silencing interval announced by Russia, the strategic collaborating ally of the regime and an accessory in the killing of the Syrian people, is flagrant evidence that the regime and its allies are giving blind eye towards observing the truce declared by the UN Security Council. It is meant as a message from Russia and the regime to the people: giving them two options, either to die in or be forced out from the Eastern Ghota; as such the Syrian regime and its allies blatantly defy the international community's decisions issued by the Security Council.

³ <https://www.un.org/press/en/2018/sc13221.doc.htm>

Conclusion

The Information Management Unit (IMU) of the Assistance Coordination Unit (ACU) documents the violations committed by the regime and its collaborating allies in Syria on a daily basis and reports the suffering people are experiencing. An effort aiming at enabling their voice to be heard and open the eyes to the hardship situation they are going through, much as this is meant to give assistance to the parties supporting the Syrian cause. Accordingly, the ACU calls upon the United Nations adopt binding decisions on all parties, on the basis of the documented testimonies and evidence, to spare civilians from being involved in the hostilities and to prevent blockades and forced displacements.



SIEGE AND DEATH IN EASTERN CHOUTA

وحدة تنسيق الدعم
ASSISTANCE COORDINATION UNIT



Incilipinar Mah.3 Nolu Cd.
Akinalan is Mrk. Kat 5
Sehitkamil/Gaziantep, Turkey

+90 (34) 2220 10 77
info@acu-sy.org
www.acu-sy.org