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We are on the verge of witnessing deaths from starvation

A letter from women in Daraya

WE ARE WOMEN in the besieged town of Daraya and we are writing to you with an urgent call to save our town.

The Syrian tragedy continues along with its repetitive scenes of violence and siege. Our town has witnessed the worst of bombing and destruction and cruel siege for over three consecutive years. Civilians have had to pay the price under the policy of starvation.

The area is witnessing a shortage of all of the basic necessities, from the very simple, such as table salt, to the more complex, such as the ability to communicate with others. This has gotten much worse since Daraya was cut off from the neighbouring town of Moadamiyet Al Sham. The town was closed off completely in the face of fleeing civilians. We were left with a population of 8,000. There was no life outside of the basements because of the fear of being bombed. After the recent cessation of hostilities, calm returned to the town. Still, there is no life outside of the basements because all the buildings have been brutally destroyed. We're appealing to all who see this, near and far: we need immediate assistance.

There is no food at all in Daraya. There are cases of malnutrition and we have resorted to

cooking soups made purely of spices in order to stave off hunger. There are signatories to this letter that have not eaten for at least two days—some longer. There is no baby milk and no breast milk due to malnutrition. Even something as simple but as necessary as dishwashing liquid is unavailable. There are no cleaning supplies in order for us to ensure hygiene and keep diseases away.

We the women of Daraya call for:

- An immediate lifting of the siege from all sides of the town
- The opening of the roads and the entry of basic necessities, from food and medicine to drinking water, clothes, shoes and cleaning supplies
- We call on the United Nations and all humanitarian and relief organisations to enter the town immediately and deliver humanitarian aid to all those affected as quickly as possible.

We appeal to journalists to write about Daraya and shed attention on the plight of our town before mass starvation takes. We are on the verge of witnessing deaths from starvation. The infants and the elderly will be the first to succumb. Please take action before it is too late.

Signatories:

Sawsan Al Abar · Khadija Hamoudah · Azizah Nouh · Mouna Nouh · Ikram Mohammed · Samar Rajeh · Najaa Mohammed
All of whom are employees of the Women Now Centre in Daraya, and along with the following signers in Daraya:

Amal Mberak · Malak Shabrak · Amani Al Saied · Kinaz Sarhan · Samera Alian · Rama Hamadeh · Haifa Al Karah · Fatemah Al Karah · Oum Adel · Oum Ismaeel · Oum Rabee · Oum Mazhar Mourad · Fatemah Abou Hamra · Maha Obaid · Merzat Abo Hamza · Nour Al Tall · Joumana Shetaawi · Manal Shakhsherou · Afraa Al Sharbaji · Waed Al Sharbaji · Azhar Al Sharbaji · Hajar Mourad · Ghada Al Abaar · Khoulod Helmi · Yaemien Shourbaji · Rima Khoushfeh · Wardah Janeh · Loubna Kanawati · Mouna Habeb · Ghanda Al Abbar · Ghader Janeh · Shaemaa Janeh · Fouton Al Abbar · Amenah Janeh · Bayan Khashfeh · Kawethar Khashfeh · Walla Al Abbar · Ayat Al Abbar · Abeer Saied Soulaïman · Joumana Janeh

FURTHER READING

'Another Madaya': Women in Syria's Daraya warn of mass starvation, Dania Akkad, Middle East Eye, 6 April 2016.

<http://www.middleeasteye.net/news/another-madaya-women-syrias-daraya-warn-imminent-starvation-50177663>

AIR DROPS

“The Royal Air Force are probably the leaders in this capability.”

Hamish de Bretton-Gordon

Remarks by Hamish de Bretton-Gordon, speaking at an event hosted by the APPG for Syria, chaired by Roger Godsiff MP, on 2nd March 2016.

This event covered the targeting of humanitarian aid and the targeting of medical workers and health facilities, with presentations from GOAL Global, and from the Syrian British Medical Society.

Some of the other testimony from the event appeared in our previous issue.

ON AIR DROPS

HAMISH DE BRETTON-GORDON:

Can I just pick up the air drop issue. It's something very close to my heart, and some of you will have heard me speak about it in this place and in the press, and I think the pathetic effort by the Russians the other day, some Russian contractors with UN aid flying an Antonov at 20,000 feet at about 300 knots, pushing some pallets out of the back of an aircraft, hoping that it's going to land in Deir Ezzor, I think put things back, and it really shouldn't.

We'll talk about the ceasefire later a bit. But one of the positive things about it is that the international community have seen, and it's been demonstrated, that Putin can control the airspace in Syria, and that gives us an element of hope. With that clear air space at the moment, in my humble opinion there is no reason why we, the British in particular, couldn't get heavily involved in this.

Just an example: A British Hercules or a British C17, could drop 65 tonnes of aid on an area the size of this room. Operating out of somewhere like Cyprus, this would be hundreds of tonnes of aid a day, and the Australians could do something

similar.

So I think as we move forward and people talk about air drops being impossible, yep, they're impossible if you get people to do it who have absolutely no idea how to do it, but if you use the professionals, part of the very great assets that Britain does have, in a humanitarian way, use our Royal Air Force and the Australian Air Force, who are in the area in as much force as we are, we could make a real difference.

MARJORIE BAHHAJ:

Hamish, how would you go about the coordination on the ground, though?

HAMISH DE BRETTON-GORDON:

Well, we were discussing this earlier. The Syrian councils that Ayman and Ghanem and others will know far better than I, certainly as I have been proffering this, they have reached out to me and the others, that they would coordinate that. They are elected councils. They would then control that aid and make sure that it gets to the most needy.

One of the reasons given for not doing it is those less able to get to that aid would still not get it, but you know with the councils which I understand are very effective, if we work with them there is a way to get it to the right people. Ayman?

DR AYMAN JUNDI:

Yes absolutely. The councils have got a lot of clout, they do look after the less physically able people who are part of the communities. So yes, of course, any aerial food drop that was coordinated with them, they would stop just the strong getting the food and they would make sure that it goes to wherever it is needed, and you have to rely on that kind of cooperation on the ground.

HAMISH DE BRETTON-GORDON:

At the end of the day, a lot of people say well it might fall into the wrong hands, a bit of water, a bit of food, a few medicines falling into the wrong hands, Al Nusra, ISIS, or whatever it is, well so what, if a majority of it gets to the people who need it, for me that's good enough.

ON PROTECTING HOSPITALS

HAMISH DE BRETTON-GORDON:

There are two particular areas that are concerning us in Syria: it's precision strike; indiscriminate attack.

I think one thing the ceasefire has shown us is that, in my humble opinion, Putin is absolutely the lynchpin, the key to everything that is currently and is likely to happen in Syria. What the ceasefire has shown is that he can control the airspace and he can control Assad, and I think that gives us real hope. And I think there are tremendous opportunities here for this House, the UK Parliament, to lead and really push that home. Now that the arch poker player if you like, Putin, has shown us his hand, it gives us an opportunity to influence it.

So on the precision side, we have heard about these directed attacks, and we know they are directed at hospital facilities in Syria, and Bab al-Hawa I think has been attacked four or five times in the last couple of weeks. For those of you who have been there, you know there can be no mistake, it's there on its own by a bridge, it is absolutely a hospital. You could miss by maybe a kilometre and you still wouldn't hit anything, so absolutely it's being targeted. But that precision is also I think one of the weaknesses.

If Putin can control his side of the airspace, then it gives us opportunities to do the same, and if he is using this precise weaponry, then I think there is a very plausible line of attack for the Coalition, and the UK being a key player of that, to influence him. It would be very simple to put exclusion zones around hospitals. And I absolutely get the counter to that: if we tell Putin where these hospitals are, there is a chance that they will be attacked.

One of the things that I have helped UOSSM [International Union of Humanitarian Medical Care Organisations] and Syria Relief to set up in Syria is something called the CBRN defence force,

and a key element of that is treating chemical casualties. But one thing that we've done in Syria is not only taught people how to treat casualties, and for civilians to prevent becoming casualties from the chlorine barrel bombs, but also to collect evidence.

And the collection of evidence, to me, is absolutely key. I fought in the Bosnian and Kosovo wars, and I am very satisfied that some of those generals are now in the International Criminal Court facing justice fifteen years later, from the evidence that was collected then.

I think when you look at people like Putin and Assad, and they can be made known that all this is being documented and they will face their day sometime, I think that would be very powerful.

If we put exclusion zones around a hospital, and very publicly tell Putin that we're doing that and where they are, then there is absolutely no excuse if those hospitals are then subsequently attacked by Russia. At the moment Putin is saying, well we don't really know where they are. Now we know that's rubbish, but if we absolutely tell him where they are, there is no excuse.

So that's the precision side. When it comes on to the indiscriminate, I haven't been under a barrel bomb attack but I have been under a thing called the 'Daisy Cutter,' which is a massive bomb which the Americans developed for the first Gulf War, the 25th Anniversary of which we've just had. And I can tell you that was absolutely horrific being under that, and I was in a tank. So I can only imagine how devastating these barrel bombs are.

And they are completely indiscriminate. They are dropped from about 3,000 feet out of a helicopter. There is nothing else that are dropping these barrel bombs. And they're indiscriminate because they ebb and flow with the winds and everything else, and there's no way of precisely targeting, and they're absolutely against every rule, be it the Geneva Convention, or whatever it is, this sort of indiscriminate bombing.

And to me it's relatively easy to stop it, and we've discussed this in the past. Quite frankly, a helicopter flying over civilian areas with barrels dropping from it, is only there for one reason. It would be very, very easy for the Coalition, whether it's with naval assets in the eastern Mediterranean or the massive air support campaign that we have over Syria to prevent that happening.

So I think there is a very realistic way, and it might seem counterintuitive by telling Putin exactly where our medical facilities are, but it would give him no excuse. And on the indiscriminate barrel bombing, again a demonstrative articulation that any helicopters flying over civilian areas are in the wrong place and will be shot down, to me that will stop it.

The next element to this is obviously the support of the desperate people who are caught up in this. With the ceasefire, supposedly the UN are getting free access to get massive amounts of aid into Syria to feed the starving and get medical support in. Now as we know that is not really happening at the moment, but what could be done under the ceasefire is massive amounts of aid dropped by air. And as I explained earlier on, the Royal Air Force C17 [can deliver] 65 tonnes of aid onto an area the size of this room, flying out of Cyprus. One aircraft could drop hundreds of tonnes of aid into places like Deir Ezzor, into places like Aleppo.

So I would plead that we take the lead on this, because actually the Royal Air Force are probably the leaders in this capability, and we have our base in Cyprus where we can do it.

Just to reiterate, I think there are really positive things that we can do to protect our hospitals, and I think the ceasefire has absolutely shown that if Putin wants to he can control the airspace and can control what Assad is doing, and we should absolutely make the most of that, perhaps in a counterintuitive way, to prevent the precision strikes and allow our doctors to get on and do the really important and dangerous jobs they're doing in a slightly less dangerous environment; stop the indiscriminate barrel bombing by creating no-helicopter zones if you like, which again I think from a military perspective is very straightforward; and also as we have the opportunity to get these significant amounts of aid in, air dropped by professionals, not by some Russian contractors who probably the first time they ever did it was when they tried to drop it over Deir Ezzor the other day.

DR ABDULLAH MAWAS:

Hamish, you were talking about actually giving information about the hospital and the healthcare centres to the Russian and presumably to the Syrian Government as well. What would your advice be to MSF who decided not to share

their information, because their place is being deliberately targeted, and the Syrian Government and the Russian were aware of these centres?

DR GHANEM TAYARA:

Just to add on Dr Mawas, giving this sort of precise location to the Russians, what's your guarantee that giving them the information that they will listen to the British or American Government? I don't think there will be a war for the sake of a hospital between Britain and Russia.

HAMISH DE BRETTON-GORDON:

It's a tricky one, but I think first of all the Russians and Assad know exactly where these hospitals are, that's my point, they know where they are anyway.

At the moment, the Russians are saying, well we are not targeting, we didn't mean to target; we all know that they are. If we reinforce publicly, in the UN Security Council and elsewhere, these are the hospitals Putin and Assad, they are designated safe areas, you are not to attack them, and they are attacked, then that's irrefutable. So it's a lateral thought, people say it's dangerous, in my view these places are being attacked anyway.

I hear Hammond and the Prime Minister talking about last resort, in the last resort we'll do air drops, in the last resort we'll do this, well, if this is not the last resort, what is?

Toby, what's your view?

TOBY CADMAN:

I think it should be done, and it should be done very publicly in the Security Council as designated protected sites. Again I agree, they know where they are, they are targeting them already. If there was a very clear declaration to make Russia sign up to it in the Security Council, these are protected sites, and then of course once that's breached there would have to be consequences.

Hamish De Bretton Gordon is a former commander of NATO's CBRN regiment, now advising NGOs in Syria.

FURTHER READING

Personnel in Cyprus assist in aid air drops

From MoD, DFID, and The Rt Hon Michael Fallon MP, 16 August 2014.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/service-personnel-in-cyprus-assist-in-aid-air-drops>

“So why do you keep dropping barrel bombs on us?”

Motaz Morad

I WAS ACTIVE in the nonviolent protest movement in 2011. After the massacre in Daraya the following year, when several hundred people were killed, we formed a local council, to run our affairs. For a while, the local council was able to issue food packages but the pressure was immense. Certain traders, who were able to store goods, controlled everything. Still, we managed to create a relatively fair system and ensure that everyone got their share.

There was no bread at all for several months at a time. When this happened we were forced to eat leaves instead. Olives with leaves became our main meal. During the summer months, you see people collecting dried figs on the ground and selling them for money. As we didn't have any sugar we would smuggle in saccharine to have it with tea but you don't feel satiated because it has no calories. So far no one has starved to death in Daraya but there is no infant milk so this has led to malnutrition and then illnesses related to malnutrition. 2013 was the worst year, things have improved slightly after that.

The local council has been able to manage the dwindling supplies in a very difficult and tense environment. Starving people have little or no patience so it takes a lot to please everyone and distribute goods in a fair way.

The UN no longer has any credibility as a humanitarian organisation; everyone now accepts this. We feel that they are controlled by Syrian regime. We believe the UN actually wants to help but is not given permission to do so by the regime.

Meanwhile doctors are performing miracles in the absence of medical equipment. The head of the hospital here has managed to figure out how to manufacture serum bags, for feeding drips. The medics are boiling water with salt so the hospital can keep functioning.

The media activists who communicate what

was happening to the world are also heroes. As are the young people who forged good relationships with international humanitarian organisations and got them to help, even if it's just a little.

When the situation really deteriorated in Daraya 50 per cent of population left. Around 8,000 people stayed. I chose to stay because I still believe in the revolution and believe we have to continue on this path. My wife and son left. I haven't seen them for three years. There are times when I really miss my family and the daily shelling really weakens my morale. I begin to wonder whether I should have left when I had the chance.

We are in control of half of Daraya and the surrounding farms while the regime has the other half. Since 2013 we have witnessed over 4,000 barrel bombs in our side of the city, so it is almost totally destroyed. Last month, the regime launched 58 barrel bombs on Daraya each and every day. This means we have all had to move from house to house several times, but not before we have tried to fix the old one several times until we finally give up and move to a new one.

After your home has been destroyed you go in to try and find a single photograph that will remind you the way your life used to be. But you can't find that photo. Imagine that. I couldn't even find my books or my bookshelves when I went back.

But in these dire conditions we have managed to forge amazing new relationships. People who have withstood these tragedies together have become like one big dysfunctional but happy family. Sometimes they fight or blame each other but at the end of the day we are all working together towards the same goal. The regime has been able to inflict a lot of suffering, but it hasn't been able to take that away from us. Possessions are gone, homes are gone, even memories are gone, but we have each other.

There is no viable political solution on offer at the moment. All along we have been saying that we are willing to accept a political solution if it guarantees our rights.

I will never forget the day I went to Damascus as part of an opposition delegation to negotiate with the government. It was immediately clear that they were still intent on adopting a scorched earth policy. The regime deals with Syrian people as if they are sheep. The delegation told us we should all behave like the sons of one nation and not let strangers interfere and create discord among us.

“So why do you keep dropping barrel bombs on us?” we asked them.

“We have to because it’s the cheapest weapon and it’s locally produced. So we use them because we don’t have any other options,” one of the delegates told us. “It’s even cheaper than ammunition.”

They looked us in the eye and told us that they’re using barrel bombs on us because they’re the cheapest option.

We explained to the delegation that 1,800 people from Daraya are being detained by the regime and gave them a list of 300 detainees who were all peaceful activists. We said that if they could obtain their release we were willing to consider a political solution.

One guy answered saying they couldn’t release the detainees from Daraya because of what that would mean for the detainees from other areas?

“The solution is simple, release all the political prisoners,” my colleague told him.

The guy shrugged and said that decision is up to the leadership. Then before we left, he admitted that some of our detainees had died under torture.

Before the uprising, my friends and I would take part in small symbolic acts of resistance. We would refuse to vote or make complaints about bribes and corruption. Even that got us into trouble. I was arrested and imprisoned by the authorities in 2003 because I participated in a demonstration against the US occupation of Iraq and against government corruption. I was in prison for two and a half years.

When we started the revolution, we thought that the West and the US would act. All the atrocities that have been committed should be enough to move the international community to act against Assad but they haven’t. The chemical attack (in E. Ghouta in 2013) was a real shock

to everyone. It’s like they forgot who used the chemical weapons and the focus became simply taking those weapons away. This upsets us deeply. 1400 people died in the chemical attack and they forgot all about it. 700 people were killed in the Daraya massacre, same thing.

Now it’s all about Isis. All of those massacres, have not moved the West to intervene. But one crime committed by Isis; a crime that was filmed cinematically and distributed to the world, this one crime has rallied all countries. Meanwhile the massacres that have killed hundreds of peaceful Syrians who just want a government to represent them, that hasn’t moved anyone.

People here have utterly lost faith in the international community. The Syrian people have realised that the West is in fact not guided by humanitarian principles but by its own interests. The regime guards the status quo, and for the West this is better than uncertainty.

The problem now is that the Syrian people feel they have been pushed into a corner where they are so exhausted they’re willing to accept any compromise just to make the war stop. But there’s a rebellious faction that wants the shelling to end but it also wants a political solution that ensures the rights of every citizen and a pluralistic democratic regime. The majority of people still want that solution.

As told by Motaz Morad, 38, from Daraya.

First published by The Syria Campaign as “Life in Daraya is cheap when the government treats you like sheep.”
<https://diary.thesyriacampaign.org/life-in-daraya-is-cheap-when-the-government-treats-you-like-sheep/>

FURTHER READING

Speaking with Syrians under siege

Interviews by The Syria Campaign, Syria Notes No. 5, 19 January 2016.

<http://www.appgfriendsofsyria.org/p/syria-notes.html>

Break the Sieges

Awareness website by The Syria Campaign.

<https://breakthesieges.org/en>

Siege Watch

Information website by PAX and The Syria Institute.

<http://siegewatch.org/>

Slow Death: Life and Death in Syrian Communities under Siege

Report by the Syrian American Medical Society, March 2015.

https://www.sams-usa.net/foundation/images/PDFs/Slow%20Death_Syria%20Under%20Siege.pdf

On the Fifth Anniversary

*Dr Sharif K al-Ghazal, Yasmine Nahlawi,
Dr Peshang Abdulhannan, Dr Mohammad Tammo*

STILL THEY DEMAND FREEDOM

FIVE YEARS, five long years and still the Syrian people demand their freedom. They have been resisting a tyrannical regime; one ruled by a family of corrupt autocrats for 46 years. But the recent entry of Daesh into the fray has muddied the waters within the media narrative. Unlike back in 2011, Syria is increasingly being seen through the lens of counter-terrorism as opposed to a people's revolt as it should be. Realities on the ground dictate that until the very recent ceasefire, widespread protests were impossible; that should not however mask the reality of the situation on the ground and the Syrian people's hatred of both the Assad regime and Daesh and their yearning for freedom.

The international community has failed the Syrian people. Syria has been abandoned, its people forgotten; left to starve and fend for themselves. When the international community had the opportunity to assist the Syrian people in the early days of the revolution they made the wrong choice and failed to help. Furthermore, the humanitarian aid that has been offered has been meagre and has contributed very little within the greater scheme of things. Moreover, the failure of the international community to stand beside the Syrian people against the brutal Assad regime and its Iranian allies opened up a vacuum for extremists to exploit; one that spawned the death cult that is Daesh. To make matters even more grave, Russia has intervened on the side of the Assad regime under the pretext of attacking Daesh though it has just brought with it more death and destruction, killing civilians in rebel held areas and making the situation even more bleak.

Established in early 2013 in the midst of the Syrian crisis, the Syrian Association of Yorkshire (SAY) has been working tirelessly on a number of projects in this time. It started by raising awareness

of the Syrian conflict and working with the local community to fund various humanitarian projects to help the people of Syria. More recently, it has been assisting Syrian refugees in settling into the country and integrating into their new society. From running language classes to practical workshops, it aims to help refugees feel more settled and acclimatised to their new community.

More recently, SAY has been successfully working with local politicians and the media culminating in various TV and radio interviews as well as meetings with high profile MPs within the Yorkshire region. This has helped further the cause of the Syrian people thousands of miles away.

From March 2011 to March 2016, the people STILL want to topple the regime.

*Dr Sharif K al-Ghazal
The Syrian Association of Yorkshire*

REFLECTION ON THE ANNIVERSARY

IT HAS BEEN FIVE LONG YEARS for the Syrian people. They have endured the worst humanitarian crisis of modern times and have been failed by world powers who have claimed to be their friends. Their neighbourhoods and villages have been reduced to rubble, and their loved ones have been brutally snatched from them in what continues to be a struggle for freedom and dignity against a brutal Assad dictatorship.

As the fifth anniversary of the Syrian revolution approaches us, Syria is in a period of relative calm. A recently announced ceasefire is helping to mitigate civilian casualties, although it has proven extremely shaky with multiple violations recorded by Assad and Russia. However, this period of military calm has been accompanied by a frenzy of activity by Syrian civil society. Spectators would

expect that Syrians, war-weary and struggling for basic survival, would use this chance to attend to their immediate needs. Instead, Syrians have displayed immense resilience and have seized this opportunity to resume the same non-violent protests against the Assad regime that they began in 2011. Syrians are in effect showing to the world that the spirit of revolution is very much alive, and that their quest for freedom and dignity will not be forsaken.

With the revival of the Syrian non-violent revolutionary spirit and the relative cessation of hostilities, it is now up to the 'friends' of the Syrian people to step up to the role that they have thus far dismally failed in. Western powers, including the UK, must recognise that foreign policy strategy in Syria built upon the pursuit of national interests has led to blowback because it failed to take into account the basic survival needs of a highly vulnerable population. They must recognise that a stable, vibrant, and free Syria will not only spread democratic ideals throughout the region, but will also help to contain the refugee crisis and the threats posed by radicalisation. In order to achieve this, the West must continue to press for guarantees for civilian protection from both Assad and Russia, ensure the delivery of humanitarian aid to at-need areas, and work towards accountability for the violations that have been committed throughout this conflict.

As Rethink Rebuild Society, we will continue to serve as a voice for the Syrian community in the UK and to advocate for these fundamental needs for the Syrian people. Follow our work at rrsoc.org or at www.facebook.com/britishsyrians. [communityofmanchester](https://www.facebook.com/britishsyrians)

Yasmine Nablawi
Rethink Rebuild Society

FIVE YEARS ON

FIVE YEARS ON since it was first said in the southern city of Daraa, "the people want the regime to fall." A sentence that led to the arrest and torture of Hamza Al-Khateeb and his teenager friends and subsequently the eruption of nationwide anti-government protests that turned to a full-scale civil war.

A war that witnessed the killing of Ghiath Matar, Ibrahim Qashoush and Mashaal Tammo,

and has ripped the country apart, killing more than 250,000 Syrians and forcing more than 11 million others from their homes. A conflict that is now more than just a battle between the Assad's regime and the rebels. Violence, war crimes and the use of chemical weapons have been familiar news while the rise of so-called Islamic State has added another dimension to it. This in turn opened the door for UK, Russian and US-led strikes in Syria, and the fleeing of more than five million people, mostly women and children, across the borders to become one of the largest refugee exoduses in recent history.

Throughout the last five years, Syria has become a playground for international forces' power fight and interference. The lack of sustainable international community support made most Syrian feels that they have been let down by everyone. This has created deep sectarian and ethnic tensions and divisions among the different groups, fragmented and weakened the opposition, and encouraged the rise of hard-line Islamist and jihadi groups. This also increased the pressure on the ill-treated Kurdish community which has been suffering for decades from the dictatorial Assad's regime, in their struggle for their rights and identity. In the absence of leadership, Kurds are doing what everyone else is doing in Syria—looking after their own interest.

In addition, the lack of communication and understanding over the Kurdish issue has entrenched outdated propaganda that accuses Kurds of separation. Kurds, therefore, see a danger that a political solution in the current climate could ease the ongoing conflict but ignite a new one for them, putting at risk the inclusive values and purposes of the Syrian revolution.

We in Kurds House, call for all involved parties to make civilians' protection their urgent priority, and help in stopping the war and establishing peace. This will be achieved by stopping the Assad's killing machine and starting building a post-Assad Syria that puts human rights at the heart of all future planning. A future that breaks the legacy of decades of rooted patterns of human rights violations and promotes mutual respect, democracy and freedom of speech.

Dr Peshang Abdulhannan & Dr Mohammad Tammo
Kurds House UK

ON THE GROUND

Monitoring the Cessation of Hostilities

Reports from SNHR, MSF, and UN

BY INTERNATIONAL AGREEMENT, the Cessation of Hostilities (CoH) in Syria commenced at 00:00 (Damascus time) on February 27, 2016.

Joint Statement of the United States and the Russian Federation, as Co-Chairs of the ISSG, on Cessation of Hostilities in Syria, 22 February 2016.

<http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2016/02/253115.htm>

SNHR

The Syrian Network for Human Rights has issued daily reports of violations of the CoH, as well as reports on particular attacks. A selection of reports:

Not Less than 21 Committed Massacres in March 2016, 11 amongst which were perpetrated by government forces.

SNHR, 7 April 2016.

<http://sn4hr.org/blog/2016/04/08/20390/>

This report documents evidence of 21 massacres: 11 by Assad regime forces; 1 by Russian forces; 3 by ISIS; 1 by armed opposition groups; 1 by International Coalition Forces; 4 by unidentified groups. Numbers killed in individual attacks ranged from 5 to 19 people.

241 Violations of the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement Through the Use of Barrel Bombs Only.

SNHR, 8 April 2016.

<http://sn4hr.org/blog/2016/04/08/20390/>

The Most Notable Violations of Cessation of Hostilities: Shelling and Massacres in “Deir Assafeir” town at the hands of government forces.

SNHR, 10 April 2016.

<http://sn4hr.org/blog/2016/04/10/20447/>

On 31 March 2016, Syrian Air Force planes attacked the town of Deir Assayer with at least 14 missiles in the space of 4 hours. 31 civilians were killed, including 9 adult women and 12 children.

MÉDECINS SANS FRONTIÈRES

Excerpts from a 7 April 2016 press release:

LAST REMAINING DOCTOR IN ZABADANI SHOT DEAD

Last week the only medical doctor remaining in the besieged town of Zabadani, and a member of a rescue team, were shot dead by a sniper after treating a patient.

In most besieged areas there are few medical doctors left, in some places none left at all. MSF documented 23 Syrian health personnel supported by the organisation killed in 2015 and 58 wounded.

In some besieged areas, it is common to see medical or nursing students with limited training. They strive to the best of their ability, and while MSF tries to provide technical advice and support from a distance, this makes it impossible for any technically difficult medical care to be provided, and also makes correct diagnosis of medical conditions extremely challenging.

TWO HOSPITALS BOMBED

Last week two MSF-supported field hospitals, a nearby school and inhabited buildings in besieged East Ghouta suburbs were bombed, leading to at least 38 killed and 87 wounded, of whom 5 wounded were medical staff.

The medics in these areas have only received extremely limited supplies over recent months, and rely mostly on MSF and other humanitarian organisations' support to source medical supplies through clandestine methods.

Over the past few weeks several besieged areas in Damascus region where MSF provides support to Syrian medical facilities have been hit by shelling attacks, including Al Marj, Deir Al Safir and Zebdine.

MEDICAL ITEMS REMOVED FROM CONVOYS

Even when the rare international aid convoys are allowed to go to besieged areas, MSF-supported medics report that essential life-saving medical items such as surgical and anesthetic supplies and blood bags are missing.

These are exactly the items that are vital to treat victims of bombings or shelling, as well as essential to treat accidental trauma and for caesarian sections or some complicated deliveries. The UN has recently declared that 80,000 medical treatments have been excluded or removed from their convoys so far in 2016.

MEDICAL EVACUATIONS STILL DENIED

From the 40 MSF regularly-supported medical facilities in besieged areas in the Damascus-region, very few patients have been authorized for medical evacuation, despite long lists of patients that are in critical condition and require life-saving treatment that is simply not available in their area. In Madaya, over the past week five people died, three of whom could probably have been stabilized and treated if urgently-called-for medical evacuations had been permitted.

[Note: Following the 7 April meeting of the International Syria Support Group's Humanitarian Access Task Force, Jan Egeland announced a plan to evacuate up to 500 people from Madaya and Zabadani, two towns near Damascus besieged by the regime and their ally Hezbollah, and Fuaa and Kafraya, besieged by rebels.]

MALNUTRITION

Despite the convoys, more than a hundred malnutrition cases have been identified by the local medical team in Madaya and 7 cases of severe malnutrition have been diagnosed in Madamiyeh.

TOTAL SIEGES STILL IMPOSED

Some areas, such as Daraya and Duma, remain completely blocked for any official humanitarian access, and repeated closure of access in the besieged neighbourhoods of Barzeh, near Damascus, and El Waer, near Homs, are alarming.

FULL REPORT

Syria: Despite cease-fire, catalogue of horror continues in besieged areas, MSF, 7 April 2016.

<http://www.msf.org/article/syria-despite-cess-fire-catalogue-horror-continues-besieged-areas>

UN NEWS CENTRE

Excerpts from a 1 April 2016 press release:

SYRIA: UN ADVISOR WARNS OF 'LOST MOMENTUM' AND FRUSTRATION IN HUMANITARIAN ACCESS TALKS

Coming out of yesterday's International Syria Support Group (ISSG) meeting on humanitarian access, Jan Egeland, Special Advisor to the UN Special Envoy for Syria, told reporters that the situation has notably improved from 2015, but the operation is now running into difficulties.

Compared with a year earlier, when UN had access to only one besieged area in Yarmouk, humanitarian supplies have now reached 150,000 people in 11 of the 18 besieged areas, he said.

In addition, convoys got a greenlight to go to three new places, Arbeen, Zamalka and Zabadin. Airdrops in Deir Ez Zor are likely to start on a regular basis within a fortnight.

"However, I will not hide that we are afraid now to lose some of the momentum that we got after the Munich meeting," Mr. Egeland said.

There is no access or greenlight at all to Douma, Darayya and East Harasta. In Douma, more than 90,000 people are in need. And there are a number of administrative problems, security issues, and delays. For the three new areas, UN has much higher number of people in need that the Government approved.

"And perhaps, most importantly, we are still not where we should be according to international law on medical services and health services for the besieged areas," he said, noting that surgical equipment is still taken off convoys, the besieged areas remain off-limits to medical personal, and medical evacuation is not permitted.

Within the last 75 hours, three children bled to death in Madaya, he said. "They were playing with an unexploded bomb, they were gravely wounded but they didn't die. They died because of medical evacuation was not allowed and possible to organize," he added.

FULL REPORT

Syria: UN advisor warns of 'lost momentum' and frustration in humanitarian access talks, UN News Centre, 1 April 2016.

<http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=53597#.VwkzEhMrJBz>

STATEMENT TO THE UNSC

Excerpts from the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator Stephen O'Brien's statement to the Security Council on Syria, 30 March 2016:

UN AID STILL FACING DAILY OBSTACLES

Truth be told, we are a long way from the sustained, unconditional and unimpeded access that is required of the parties under international law and was and is demanded by this Council in its resolutions. Humanitarian conditions remain dire throughout the country, with some 13.5 million people remaining in need across the country, and we are still facing daily obstacles to reach those who need our help the most.

AID REACHING ONLY 10-30% OF PEOPLE

In 2016 so far, we have only reached some 30 per cent of people in besieged areas and less than 10 per cent of people in hard-to-reach areas.

From the recently submitted plan for cross-line convoys in April, only 6 of 11 locations were approved by the Syrian authorities and for some locations they specified the delivery quantities that would mean we could cover only a portion of the population in each area. We are still without approval to three besieged areas mere minutes' drive away from UN warehouses in Damascus: Namely Duma, East Harasta and Darayya. The situation is dreadful in these areas, particularly in Darayya where we continue to receive reports of severe shortages of food, clean water, medicines, electricity and basic commodities, with the food security and nutrition status thought to be disastrous, with reports of people even forced to eat grass. The daily misery in these areas shames us all.

The humanitarian situation in many hard-to-reach areas also remains critical. For example, I remain deeply troubled about the conditions for the more than 210,000 civilians in northern Rural Homs, specifically the towns of Rastan, Talbiseh, Houla, Termallah, and Taldo, as well as 15,000 people in the adjacent area of Habarnafse and

surrounding communities in rural Hama. People in these areas have essentially no possibility to move in or out of the areas and have diminishing access to clean water, medical care, and food. The recent convoy to Houla was vital and approvals for convoys to the other parts of northern rural Homs give hope that we will be able to alleviate some of the suffering, but we remain extremely concerned about the situation facing civilians in these areas.

We should also not forget the situation for the estimated nearly two million people living under daily oppression and terror in ISIL-held areas. We have little to no access to them and continue to receive reports of widespread human rights abuses.

THE ASSAD REGIME IS REMOVING MEDICAL SUPPLIES FROM CONVOYS

Over 80,000 treatments have been excluded or removed from convoys in 2016, the vast majority by the Syrian authorities. The range of removed items is scandalous—from items to treat child malnutrition to medicine for preventing bleeding after child birth. There can be no possible justification for the removal of these or any other basic medical items.

Medical evacuations from besieged and hard-to-reach areas are also not being facilitated by the parties to the extent that they should be.

People continue to die unnecessarily as a result. I am not in a position to put a number on that but clearly this is unacceptable. Similarly, medical workers are not getting the access they need to undertake proper medical assessments and treat patients. Having a few hours with patients on the day of a convoy is simply not enough; we need regular access for medical and humanitarian workers for as many follow-up visits as are required.

FULL STATEMENT

Statement to the Security Council on Syria, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator Stephen O'Brien, 30 March 2016.

https://docs.unocha.org/sites/dms/Documents/USG_ERC%20Stephen%20OBrien%20Statement%20on%20Syria%20SecCo%2030March2016%20CAD.pdf

ALL-PARTY PARLIAMENTARY GROUP FRIENDS OF SYRIA

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