

URGENT ACTION

529 PATIENTS ARE STILL AWAITING MEDICAL EVACUATION

29 of the 558 patients awaiting medical evacuation in besieged Eastern Ghouta have been evacuated and transferred to hospitals in Damascus for treatment. 529 more patients still require urgent medical treatment.

On 27 December 2017, the Syrian government approved the medical evacuation of 29 critical cases from Eastern Ghouta. This evacuation was completed on Friday 29 December 2017 with 17 children, six women, and six men transferred to hospitals in Damascus, where they are being treated for serious injuries or medical conditions such as heart disease, cancer, and kidney failure. Eastern Ghouta is an area near Damascus which is besieged by government forces, the area is home to around 400,000 civilians.

According to medical personnel in Eastern Ghouta, 14 people have died while awaiting medical evacuation. The medical evacuation of 572 people with severe injuries and chronic diseases has been pending approval from the Syrian government since July 2017. Medical personnel corroborated news about the evacuation being agreed after negotiations that led to the release of individuals held by the armed opposition. These 29 cases were at the top of the list of patients awaiting medical evacuations due to the urgency of the cases.

529 more patients still require urgent medical treatment for their injuries and diseases. Furthermore, under international humanitarian law the sick or injured must not be treated as bargaining chips; they must receive necessary medical treatment without conditions. Doctors and medical workers in Eastern Ghouta are unable to provide adequate medical care due to lack of adequate surgical supplies, medical equipment and medicine, particularly for treatment of chronic diseases such as cancer, heart disease, and diabetes.

Please write immediately in Arabic, English or your own language:

- Calling on the Syrian government to unconditionally allow medical evacuations to Damascus
- Urging the government to immediately lift the siege on Eastern Ghouta;
- Calling on it to provide access to UN humanitarian agencies and their implementing partners.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 19 FEBRUARY 2018 TO:

Permanent Representative to the UN

Bashar Ja'afari

Ambassador Extraordinary and
Plenipotentiary

820 Second Avenue, 15th Floor
New York, NY 10017, USA

Fax: +1 212 983 4439

Email: syria.pr@outlook.com

Salutation: **Your Excellency**

President

Bashar al-Assad

Fax: +963 11 332 3410 (keep trying, if it
does not go through, include your
message to the president in an e-mail to
the Ambassador, asking for it to be
forwarded)

Email: syria.pr@outlook.com

Salutation: **Your Excellency**

And copies to:

Permanent Representative to the

Mission of the Russian Federation to the
UN

Nebenzia Vassily Alekseevich

136 East 67 Street,
New York, N.Y. 10065

Fax: +1 212 628-0252

Email: press@russiaun.ru

There is currently no Syrian Embassy in the UK.

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date. This is the first update of UA 275/17. Further information:
www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde24/7612/2017/en

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

In February 2017, the Syrian government captured the areas of al-Qaboun and Barze, which border the Harasta neighbourhood of Eastern Ghouta, and closed all smuggling tunnels that had for years guaranteed a minimum flow of food, water, and medical supplies. On 3 October, the Syrian government further tightened the siege by closing the last remaining entry point to Douma, the al-Wafideen checkpoint, impeding access to medical and humanitarian aid and barring civilian movement. Only two aid convoys have been allowed in since, but both were significantly understocked to address the humanitarian needs of the population, and all medical supplies were removed by the government. Since October, the humanitarian situation in Eastern Ghouta has significantly deteriorated with prices of medicine and basic food supplies, like milk and bread, skyrocketing.

In August 2015, Amnesty International published a report documenting the unlawful siege of Eastern Ghouta and attacks on civilian objects (<https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde24/2079/2015/en/>). In November 2017, Amnesty International released a report on mass displacement inside Syria (<https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde24/7309/2017/en/>), exposing the government's strategy of prolonged sieges with the aim of forcibly displacing the local population. Simultaneously, the Syrian government forces escalated the air strikes and artillery shelling on Eastern Ghouta using Soviet-made banned cluster munitions and improvised rockets, killing and injuring civilians. According to the Landmine and Cluster Munition Monitor (<http://the-monitor.org/en-gb/reports/2016/syria/cluster-munition-ban-policy.aspx>), these munitions first appeared in Syria after Russia began missile strikes against anti-government groups in September 2015. Such weapons are banned by more than 100 countries due to the enormous danger presented to civilians by their indiscriminate nature. For years now, Amnesty International has been calling on all states to immediately halt the use, production, transfer, and stockpiling of cluster munitions and to join the 2008 Convention on Cluster Munitions (CCM).

Further information on UA: 275/17 Index: MDE 24/7665/2018 Issue Date: 08 January 2018