

P R E S S R E L E A S E

"It feels like the end of the world"
Families in Eastern Ghouta shelter from intense bombing

20 February 2018 - Thousands of families trapped in Eastern Ghouta have been left fearing for their lives, as unprecedented levels of bombing and shelling have pounded the opposition-held enclave in the last 48 hours. In some parts of Eastern Ghouta the destruction is now even greater than at the height of the Aleppo crisis in 2016, yet with only a tiny fraction of the global attention and outrage.

At least 100 people, including dozens of children, have reportedly been killed in the last 24 hours, with no end in sight to the bombing that's destroyed homes and forced people underground. Our local partners have told Save the Children that four hospitals including a maternity clinic were hit by bombing on Monday (19 Feb) and the streets are completely empty apart from the wail of ambulances ferrying the injured to makeshift clinics.

A spokesperson from Syria Relief, a Save the Children partner, says:

"The situation is really awful. The planes haven't stopped for a second throughout the entire night. I went out early to get a bag of bread this morning. There is only one bakery open in all of Ghouta and there were more than 500 men waiting so I couldn't get any. Children have never experienced this much fear. All night you could hear crying, scared children. Their mothers are living in horror, they didn't get any sleep last night. Ghouta yesterday was full of darkness, there wasn't a bulb on, there was no light anywhere. The people are calling on the UN and other organisations to intervene. We don't want anything at all except for the shelling and bombardment to stop."

New video footage taken by Syria Relief last week shows the extent of the destruction, with a young boy searching for family belongings in the rubble of his home.

Anas* says:

"We were in the basement when we heard an explosion. We came the next day and we found our house destroyed. We started pulling our belongings from the rubble and we are still trying to do that until now."

In the Ein Terma neighbourhood of Eastern Ghouta, where 18,500 people still live, the most recent satellite images show 71 percent of buildings are now destroyed or damaged. In Zamalka, another major neighbourhood in Eastern Ghouta, 59 percent of buildings are destroyed or damaged and there has been no water or electricity network for at least two years.

Thousands of families now spend most of their days and nights in hiding. Local aid workers told us of 4,100 families who are now living in a network of underground basements and shelters – more than half without water, sanitation or ventilation systems, making children vulnerable to the spread of disease. More than 350,000 civilians remain trapped in Eastern Ghouta.

An aid worker from Eastern Ghouta says:

"Some people flew out of their houses from the second or third floors (because of the force of explosions). There are women and children who flew out of their houses and landed on the ground, their bones completely broken."

As the UN Security Council prepares to meet this week to discuss the crisis, Save the Children says an immediate ceasefire is desperately needed.

Save the Children's Syria Response Director Sonia Khush says:

"The situation is absolutely abhorrent. The bombing has been relentless, and children are dying by the hour. These families have nowhere left to run – they are boxed in and being pounded day and night. We urgently need a ceasefire so that the killing and maiming stops. We also desperately need humanitarian access, so that food, medical supplies and shelter can be delivered to people who have borne the brunt of this horrific war that is getting worse every day."

According to Save the Children's new report [The War on Children: Time to End Violations Against Children in Armed Conflict](#), Syria is the world's most dangerous country for children in conflict. We are witnessing shocking abuses committed against children in Syria daily, even though warring parties are obliged to protect children from violations. Moreover, perpetrators are not being held to account.

For multimedia, including audio files and video footage from Eastern Ghouta, click [here](#).

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About Save the Children

Save the Children believes every child deserves a future. Around the world, we work every day to give children a healthy start in life, the opportunity to learn and protection from harm. When crisis strikes, and children are most vulnerable, we are always among the first to respond and the last to leave. We ensure children's unique needs are met and their voices are heard. We deliver lasting results for millions of children, including those hardest to reach.

We do whatever it takes for children – every day and in times of crisis – transforming their lives and the future we share.