

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

**Medical and Humanitarian organizations use Three Billboards
to call on UN to stop violence in Syria**

22 February 2018 - A coalition of medical and humanitarian organizations, some working inside besieged Eastern Ghouta, have urged the United Nations Security Council to vote for an immediate cessation of hostilities to allow urgent humanitarian assistance to all areas in need in Syria.

The Security Council is expected to vote today on a resolution aimed at implementing the cessation of hostilities and lifting sieges on areas like Eastern Ghouta. More than 300 people have been killed there by Syrian government and allied forces since Sunday while more than 20 health facilities were subject to bombardment. The resolution would also prevent further indiscriminate attacks from armed opposition groups in Damascus, where at least 15 have been killed since Sunday.

The coalition, which includes organizations like Save the Children, Care International and Physicians for Human Rights (PHR), are making themselves heard loud and clear in New York today by deploying three billboards to circle the United Nations building, calling out the Security Council and demanding answers for their inaction.

Mirroring a tactic from the Oscar-nominated film *Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri*, the billboards say "500,000 dead in Syria / And still no action? / How come, Security Council?"

- **Photos and video footage of the billboards will be made available here throughout the day: <https://goo.gl/Kjh42Z>**

"The situation inside Ghouta is catastrophic. So many people are dying that the numbers of the dead keep flowing into each other, we can't keep count," said Dr Hamza, a doctor with the Syrian American Medical Society (SAMS) in Eastern Ghouta. "The amount of terror we are going through cannot be described."

He said that families are "holed up in basements terrified of the strafing planes and bombardment." Because of the lack of medical attention and poor living conditions, skin diseases such as scabies are rampant and chronic diseases continue to be exacerbated.

In their joint call to the UN Security Council, the coalition calls on all members to support the passage of a humanitarian resolution and use their influence to make the cessation a reality. They are asking for:

1. A humanitarian pause/cessation of violence throughout Syria;
2. Sustained humanitarian access through weekly UN humanitarian aid convoys to all areas in need, including those in opposition-held areas;
3. Emergency medical evacuations with necessary safety guarantees to patients in need of urgent treatment outside of besieged areas;
4. Commitments from all parties to the conflict to comply with their obligations under international law to prioritize the protection of civilians and guarantee the protection of hospitals and other medical facilities;

5. Lifting of the sieges, most urgently on eastern Ghouta, the largest Syrian city under besiegement. Around 400,000 have been living under siege there since 2013, leaving residents starving and many close to death.

Dr Hamza continued: "I just treated a woman in her twenties who spoke her last words just three hours ago. She was seven months pregnant and we couldn't save her. There is a huge shortage of medicines and equipment to treat patients in Ghouta. None of those being killed are military targets, they're all civilians."

Refusal to deliver medical supplies prevents doctors from fulfilling their duties. Trauma drugs and surgical equipment are non-existent, and in Syria they are systematically removed from humanitarian convoys without any justification.

One of the biggest challenges doctors face is the refusal of medical evacuation requests for critically ill patients, including those with tumors and serious heart problems. In the rare cases where they can evacuate patients, many die while waiting for a medical evacuation out of Syria or treatment inside the country. Currently, more than 700 patients require medical evacuation.

The recent onslaught of violence comes on top of one of the worst hunger crises since the beginning of the Syrian conflict, with the UN reporting that 12 percent of preschoolers in eastern Ghouta are suffering from acute malnutrition.

Ends

*****Please note that Crisis Action works behind the scenes to build coalitions that protect civilians in conflict and should not be quoted in coverage.*****

Notes to Editors:

- For interviews with coalition spokespeople at the site in New York, please contact: Gareth Sweeney (gareth.sweeney@crisisaction.org or +1 646-429-2585) or Shilpa Venigandla (newyork1@crisisaction.org or +1 650-814-2705)
- For interviews with representatives from the Syrian America Medical Society, including Dr Hamza in eastern Ghouta, please contact: Dr. Mohamad Katoub mohamadk@sams-usa.net or +905316550082 (Turkey) or Lobna Hassairi lobna.hassairi@sams-usa.net (Los Angeles)
- **Photos and video of Three Billboards Outside the UN, as well as recent images and footage from eastern Ghouta, available for use by all media here: <https://goo.gl/Kjh42Z>**
- The coalition consists of: CARE International; CCFD-Terre Solidaire; International Rescue Committee (IRC); Independent Doctors' Association (IDA); Médecins du Monde (Doctors of the World); Mercy Corps; Physicians for Human Rights (PHR); Syrian American Medical Society (SAMS); Save the Children; and Union of Medical Care and Relief Organizations (UOSSM).

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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.