

## P R E S S   R E L E A S E

**Save the Children-supported schools bombed amid escalating violence as 50,000 displaced in southern Syria**

*Destroyed classroom in the Olive Branch 'alternative learning centre'*

*(image courtesy of Olive Branch Organisation)*

*Berlin, 28. Juni 2018.* A Save the Children-supported education facility reaching 536 students in Dara'a, Syria has been badly damaged after being hit in an airstrike, just hours after classes had to be suspended for security reasons amid escalating violence. In a separate incident, at another school run by Save the Children's partner organisation Olive Branch, a guard was injured in an airstrike when he went to check on the facility and later died of his wounds.

A tented classroom set up by Olive Branch in a camp for displaced people was also destroyed this week when the camp was bombed, and the population forced to flee again. All 52 education facilities run by Save the Children's partners in southern Syria have now been forced to temporarily close due to widespread airstrikes and growing instability.

Last week's attack on the 'Alternative Learning Centre', which provided education for children aged 3-15, destroyed large parts of the facility. The centre was a vital service to the local community, offering early learning and development for young children and catch up classes for children who are unable to attend formal schools, often because they have missed years of education due to the conflict.

There are reports of multiple casualties so far in the conflict in Dara'a governorate, and the fighting has moved close to the important border crossing point for aid supplies. At least 50,000 people have had to flee their homes according to the UN, many of them women and children, with more expected to be displaced in the coming days.

Sonia Khush, Save the Children Syria Response Director, said: “Schools are meant to be safe havens for children, even in a war zone. These centres provided essential education to hundreds of vulnerable children, many of whom have already been forced to miss months or years of school due to the conflict, and now they lie in ruins.

“Children in southern Syria are facing terror and uncertainty, with heavy bombardment in some areas and thousands forced to flee. It’s essential that civilians are protected and that explosive weapons are not used in populated areas, where children and the facilities they rely on are vulnerable to attack. If the violence continues, we may be forced to suspend vital programming and see even more schools come under attack.”

Save the Children is calling for an immediate ceasefire, in line with the agreement negotiated for the south by Russia, Jordan and the US just last year. All sides must respect International Humanitarian Law and protect schools, hospitals and other vital civilian infrastructure from attack. Children are particularly vulnerable to the impact of explosive weapons, and warring parties should make a particular effort to protect them.

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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.