



A Distress Call for a Quarter Million Syrians Living under Siege in Deir Az-Zour Neighborhoods Al-Joura and Al-Qosour between the Hammer and the Anvil



Deir Az-Zour province is recognized as one of the most notable Syrian provinces that participated in the popular demonstrations against the ruling authorities, and the numbers of participant on a Friday has reached 400,000 according to statistics. After government forces lost control over wide areas of it by the end of 2013, government forces targeted the city almost daily with airstrikes and caused the destruction of almost quarter of its buildings, and the second half of the year 2014, ISIS heavily attacked the armed opposition, as ISIS killed 1152 armed opposition gunmen, as Deir Az-Zour is considered the province that suffered the most killings of its armed men by ISIS.

Choices seem to be limited right now in front of civilians from the province, between living under the tyranny and suppression and exposure to looting, arrests and torture by government forces, and also living under siege imposed by ISIS, or living in areas controlled by ISIS where extreme laws are enforced in addition to intimidation, detention and government forces airstrikes' bombing.





In mid-January 2015, ISIS imposed a siege on Al-Joura and Al-Qosour neighborhoods in Deir Az-Zour, in order to clamp down these two neighborhoods controlled by government forces.

By the beginning of February 2015, ISIS tightened up the siege more and closed all the roads and crossings, which increased the suffering of a population of 277,000 living in these neighborhoods, most of them are displaced from other neighborhoods controlled by ISIS.

In the beginning of March the livelihood situation started dropping badly after running out of food and supplies, especially after the government forces closed the international road between Damascus and Deir Az-Zour and that is the only road that supplies the city with food, medicine, and building materials, as government forces also prevented the families from leaving to areas controlled by ISIS, which made the situation even worse.

Government forces and its supporters aren't affected by this siege as food and other needs are transported to them by Ilyushin planes that land in Deir Az-Zi military air base.

Since Wednesday, March 25, 2015, electricity have been interrupted for long periods of time Al-Joura and Al-Qosour, leading to cut off for drinking water, as water stations stopped working, which made things even more difficult with the lack of fuels to make the station works and the rise in its price, as benzene liter reached 4 dollars and the refined benzene liter sold by ISIS for 2 dollars, kerosene liter 3 dollars, and benzene about 2.5 dollars per liter, as for the gas it's completely not available.

ISIS prevented the Syrian Red Crescent from entering the neighborhoods that are under siege, and banned them from helping, on top of the negative effects of that was that it caused the running out of chlorine liquid used to sterilize the drinking water, which forces the employees of the water stations to use Sodium hypochlorite or chlorine powder as a replacement to sterilize drinking water.





On Tuesday, March 31, 2015 government forces allowed the sick to leave Al-Joura and Al-Qosour neighborhoods, provided they prove their health issues and allowed them to take one escort.

The sick individuals that left needed to walk 3 km on foot through agricultural rough roads as they were afraid of ISIS snipers killing them.

SNHR communicated with a number of people who talked about the catastrophic living conditions and serious famine threatening the population in the besieged neighborhoods, in addition to the start of the spread of the specter of epidemics and diseases.

The lack of water and lack of ability to disinfect it inevitably will cause more widespread diseases, hepatitis and typhoid and cholera, as well as skin diseases such as scabies.

Mohammad Khalif, SNHR researcher in Deir Az-Zour said:

“The humanitarian situation is miserable and the civilians living under siege in Al-Joura and Al-Qosour are waiting death of sickness or starvation, government forces are using civilians as human shield fearing for ISIS breaking in, and we think that this is the reason why it is preventing them from leaving.

People are dying for food. On Tuesday, March 17, 2015 a man killed by ISIS sniper as he tried to enter Al-Joura and Al-Qosour neighborhoods swimming in Forat river, and on Friday, April 3, 2015 a man drowned in Forat river while trying to leave the siege to bring food, and the siege expanded to medical supplies and especially diabetes and blood pressure medicines almost completely unavailable”.





Reem is a college student from Deir Az-Zour communicated with SNHR and informed us about the lack of food and the rise in the prices of the available food:

“We only have a little bit of sugar and oat at home even the shops and markets are empty after more than a month of extreme siege, and even if there was a little bit of food available it’s too expensive and we can’t afford it”

The siege caused a rise in the prices of necessary food supplies, as rice reached 3 dollars per kilo, and almost 4 dollars per liter for oil, as for bread it reached half a dollar for a package, and for children milk it’s almost unavailable.

Abu Ahmad a grocery salesman in Al-Joura talked to SNHR:

“I’ve stopped working as there was no more vegetables in the markets except for a few home grown vegetables in the town of Bageiliyye under the control of Assad regime, and it’s too expensive, we used to secure the needs of vegetables in these areas from the countryside of Deir Az-Zour and Raqqa and things were at peace and the Free Syrian Army factions didn’t intercept us, and the Assad regime checkpoints a little bribe was enough to go through but now ISIS checkpoints doesn’t even allow people to come in and out of Deir Az-Zour”.

The international community must take urgent steps to facilitate the delivery of humanitarian aid, and work on breaking the siege over about quarter million civilians, according to resolutions 2139 issued on February 22, 2014 and resolution 2165 issued on July 14, 2014 that clearly states providing the possibility for the aid workers and humanitarian supplies to reach all the areas with no difficulties, and give the civilians the chance to evacuate the areas.

As for the controlling forces, they must respect the international humanitarian law by immediately ending the siege that is considered a war crime, and stop using civilians and sieging them and use them as shields as a method of war.

The principle of “Responsibility to Protect” must be activated and applied immediately in Syria and steps must be taken under Article 7, after all the resolutions issued under Article 6 have failed.

If not applied and activated now, when and where will it be?

