

## **NGOs Call for a De-Escalation of Violence and an Increase in Access in Eastern Ghouta**

A group of leading NGOs expresses grave concern about the plight of civilians in Eastern Ghouta, where violence has escalated in recent weeks, and Syrians are experiencing a severe lack of food, medical, and other supplies. We are calling on parties to the conflict to deescalate violence and urgently increase access for humanitarian purposes.

The organizations call on the parties to the conflict to fulfill their obligations under international humanitarian law. We also call on member states with influence over the parties to fulfill their humanitarian commitments as mandated through the humanitarian task force of the International Syria Support Group (ISSG) and through the de-escalation agreements brokered through the Astana process. The following commitments made during the Astana process must be immediately implemented:

- Rapid, safe and unhindered humanitarian access
- Delivery of medical and food aid to local populations
- Unhindered movement of unarmed civilians
- Lasting ceasefire between conflicting parties

The ceasefire announced on 28 November only momentarily decreased the violence, which immediately intensified once the two-day period had ended. In November, only two humanitarian convoys entered the area, the most recent of which provided food baskets, flour, and medical supplies for 7,000 of the 400,000 civilians who remain trapped in Eastern Ghouta. This provided crucial temporary life-saving assistance but is not enough to sustain the civilian population as long as the siege continues. As of early December, food prices are still at least 200% higher than prices in August.

According to Syrian humanitarian workers based in Eastern Ghouta, food, when available, is prohibitively expensive; fuel shortages and high prices will continue to increase as winter comes; access to drinking water is threatened; and cases of malnutrition are on the rise. Other local organizations have reported difficulties in procuring necessary goods, and the increase in shelling and airstrikes has led to a suspension of their programs. This situation is exacerbating the impact on an already vulnerable population, specifically female-headed households, people with disabilities, children, and elderly people, and this is likely to worsen with winter fast approaching.

The 400,000 civilians in Eastern Ghouta represent nearly 95% of the total besieged population in Syria, according to UN statistics. According to UNICEF, 11.9% of children under five in Eastern Ghouta are acutely malnourished. This is the highest level that has been recorded in Syria since the conflict began. Over 400 people are awaiting urgent medical evacuation.

Parties currently involved in the Geneva process have the ability to avert further humanitarian catastrophe in Eastern Ghouta. They must immediately allow unhindered humanitarian access and movement of civilians as well as ensure a credible and lasting ceasefire is implemented.

CARE

Finn Church Aid

International Rescue Committee

Médecins du Monde – France

Mercy Corps

Oxfam

Save the Children

Syria INGO Regional Forum (SIRF)

Syria Relief & Development