At this moment, more than 400,000 people under siege in Eastern Ghouta face death. Eastern Ghouta, an area of suburbs on the eastern side of Damascus, has been under siege for almost 5 years now, cut off from medicine, food and the outside world. But never have the women, children and men in Eastern Ghouta faced violence of the level they face today. They are under non-stop bombardment from fighter jets, helicopters and artillery.

Syrian and Russian forces have escalated their attacks on Eastern Ghouta over the past days. Ground forces have surrounded the area, ready to start their offensive. Through our project Siege Watch, a joint project with The Syria Institute that monitors the situation in besieged communities in Syria, yesterday we documented in only one day 110 civilians killed, hundreds injured, 7 hospitals bombed, 131 air strikes, 44 barrel bombs, 28 surface-to-surface elephant missiles, 5 cluster bombs and countless other artillery and rocket fire. Hospitals and civil defence centres are targeted by these strikes, so that those injured cannot be treated and those stuck under the rubble cannot be saved.

Through Siege Watch, we have documented the systematic strategy of the Assad regime and its allies to force populations under opposition control into surrender through campaigns of sieges, deprivation and bombardment, leaving them in the end no choice but to surrender and leave or to die. Given the massive and systematic character of the war crimes committed as part of this “surrender or die” campaign, many of these war crimes also amount to crimes against humanity.

In the past few years, we have seen many communities suffer this fate. Yet Eastern Ghouta is the largest besieged area in Syria with the largest population under siege. More than 400,000 people face the same fate as the people of Homs, Darayya and East Aleppo. But this time, we fear the scale of war crimes and crimes against humanity will be even higher. The international community has not only a moral, but also a legal obligation to stop that from happening.

The situation in Ghouta no longer allows politicians to limit their actions to statements and expressions of grief and powerlessness. If the UN and its member states cannot do anything to stop this, who can? All members of the international community have a responsibility to take immediate action to stop this massacre.

PAX calls on the UN, the EU and their member states to:

- Take immediate political action to allow for the establishment of an unconditional cease fire without exceptions.
- Increase political pressure on the Assad regime and its allies to allow sustained delivery of food and medicine.
- Acknowledge that the systematic and large-scale war crimes as part of the “surrender or die” strategy amount to crimes against humanity; to acknowledge that the international community has a duty to stop and prevent these crimes; and to take immediate action to hold those responsible for these crimes accountable.

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1 https://twitter.com/SiegeWatch/status/966088803432714240