

## Don't Let Eastern Ghouta's Fate Be Like Aleppo's

The Eastern Ghouta region has been sieged by Assad Regime for over 4 years. The city, where the humanitarian crisis is already profound, is about to become a mass grave in which hundreds of people lost their lives in a short period of time due to the attacks that escalated last week.

The Ghouta region is in a strategical position because of its proximity to the capital, Damascus, and violent conflicts have been taking place in this region all along. This region, where the opposition had been dominant since the beginning of the revolution and especially the year 2012, was imprinted on the memories as a strategical place in which the opposition prepared to enter Damascus under the leadership of Jaysh Al-Islam in 2013. This initiative in the region which is 20 minutes away from the capital, resulted in failure because of the intervention of Iran and Hezbollah in Syria. Ghouta was completely blockaded after the active involvement of Russia. Therefore, the closest threat to Damascus, the fortress of Assad, was somehow removed.

In 2013, the Assad Regime carried out sarin gas attacks in this region without differentiating, and hundreds of people lost their lives including children. No decision from the UN was issued due to the veto of Russia regarding the attacks about which the international community is silent.

One of the most important strategies of the Assad Regime in the Syrian war is viewed as creating small-scale fronts (pockets) to confine the opposition to a narrow area and dissolve them respectively. With the bombardment that is targeting the civilians and the profound humanitarian crisis in the region which is under embargo; the opponents are forced to surrender. The Assad Regime trying to discipline the masses by punishing not only the opposition forces but also all civilians in the related area, has not gotten any results even though it concentrated this strategy, which it had previously applied to Homs, Hama, and Aleppo, in Ghouta.

Many international human rights foundations describe the collective punishing method of the Assad Regime targeting the civilians as a crime against humanity. In the reports, it was emphasized that the Assad Regime is forcing people to migrate with its "Die or Leave" tactic and it is blocking the transfer of food and medical aid. It is striking that the western public opinion hasn't reacted to this situation despite the existence of these reports. This silence of death in the west that is helping Russia and Assad is offering an opportunity to the USA and parties that are aiming at land reclamation before the Geneva meeting, to legitimate the achievements of PKK/YPG.

In the region, where the Assad Regime and Iranian backed mercenaries are concentrated with the bombardment support of Russian aircraft; Faylak Al-Rahman and Jaysh Al-Islam are exhibiting a great resistance. Besides of these two main groups, few militias from Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham elements are also seen effective in the region. However, the movement area of the groups is gradually shrinking in the region where thousands of civilians are trapped.

Despite the 4-year-old embargo and the ongoing siege, the Assad Regime hasn't been able to conquer the region. For this objective, a convoy consisting of 200 vehicles from militias that officiated in Aleppo and Deir ez-Zor besides the Russian aircraft and Russimercenaries set out to Damascus.

The region is on the edge of a massacre; because of the discourse of Sergei Lavrov, the foreign affairs minister of Russia, about "the possibility of applying the experiences that were obtained in Aleppo, to Eastern Ghouta". Thus, the death of 248 civilians and the injury of more than 1200 people in the last 48 hours in the attacks which were carried out by the regime forces after the explanations with the support of Russia and the Iranian mercenaries; are the clearest indicators of this situation.

Eastern Ghouta had been announced as "the region to reduce the tension" with the Astana process. Despite this, aircraft of Russia and the Assad Regime went on bombarding the region whose guarantor is Russia. Against the bombardments which are described as "the war of annihilation" by the opposition, all human rights observers called for the immediate intervention from UN concerning the prevention of the bombing of civilians. Again, according to the opposition, the real goal of Russia is not only gaining a

military victory but also burying the process into the ground by clipping the wings of the opposition.

On the other hand, the UN contented itself with saying that “it is worried by the bombardment to which the civilians are exposed” with the statements that were made by the spokespersonship of the secretary-general of the UN, instead of taking tangible steps.

While these are happening in the military and politic area, the humanitarian tragedy is intensifying in East Ghouta which is located in the countryside of Damascus and in which more than 400.000 people live. In the last 3 months, more than 700 people lost their lives. Even with great efforts, very limited amounts of humanitarian aid can be transferred to the region where the humanitarian crisis is at the highest level.

The fact that Ghouta is far from the borders of Turkey and that there is no geographical connection between the two is a major problem that prevents the transportation of humanitarian aid from Turkey. The aids are pillaged on the way to the civilians under the name of “tributes and fees”.

On the other hand, some non-governmental organization’s humanitarian aids, which are conveyed to only some parts of the community; are ceased and launched to the gray market by “the war elites”. In the statement that was issued on last Friday, the UN marked that only %3 of the population receive the relief aid of the UN because humanitarian aid trucks are blocked by the Syrian security forces.

It was announced that more than 300 people are on their deathbed due to the embargo, siege and the shortage of medical appliances since 2013 in the region where lots of injured people reside. It was recorded that children and babies die or about to die because of lack of nutrition, and the injured experience the same thing because of the shortage of medical instruments.

In case of the escalation of the events in the Eastern Ghouta, the situation might result in an even more tragical outcome than the Aleppo case. If no agreement that can stop the murder of the civilians is provided, this tragedy will pass into the history of Syria as a black mark.

It is seen as a humane responsibility to set notably international community in motion and increase the susceptibility to prevent the systematical targeting and murder of the civilians.

*Tercüme: İbrahim Mercan*