

# Syria: UN rights officials decry 'devastating' impact of surging violence on civilians

19 January 2018 – Concerned over the devastating impact of escalating violence in Syria, where dozens of people in eastern Ghouta have been killed in recent airstrikes, and schools and hospitals are being deliberately destroyed, senior United Nations officials have underscored the obligation on all parties to the conflict, and the international community, to protect civilians from atrocity crimes.

“We cannot stand by silently in the face of indiscriminate violence and violations of international human rights and humanitarian law,” said Adama Dieng the UN Special Adviser on Prevention of Genocide, and Ivan Simonovic, the UN Special Adviser on the Responsibility to Protect, in a [statement](#) issued Thursday.

“We urge all stakeholders, including the Security Council, to condemn this violence, and we urge the parties to the conflict to ensure that basic principles of humanitarian law are protected, in particular with regards to proportionality and distinction.”

The worst impact of fighting has been felt in eastern Ghouta (near the capital, Damascus) and Idlib (in the north-west of the country) – both designated as de-escalation areas under the Astana process, were “civilians should expect a minimum level of safety,” added the statement.

However, since mid-November 2017, the estimated 393,000 people in eastern Ghouta have been subjected to airstrikes, shelling and bombardment on an almost daily basis by Government forces and their allies. Rockets fired by armed opposition groups in eastern Ghouta into residential areas of Damascus have reportedly further aggravated the situation.

In southern Idlib and northern rural Hama, where fighting between government forces and armed opposition groups – which control a majority of the Idlib governorate – has escalated since December, over 200,000 civilians have been displaced and numerous people have been killed.

In addition to civilians, medical facilities too have come under attack.

Between 3 and 10 January, at least four health care facilities and two education facilities have reportedly been attacked, added the statement.

In the statement, Mr. Dieng and Mr. Simonovic, underscored that indiscriminate attacks or those directly target civilians or civilian objects are a violation of fundamental principles of international humanitarian law.

“All actors involved in the conflict in Syria have an obligation to ensure that these fundamental principles are respected,” underscored the statement.

Across war-ravaged Syria, more than six million people are internally displaced, many displaced multiple times, and more than five million Syrians have been forced as refugees in other countries.

At the same time, estimates indicate that more than half of the country's basic infrastructure has been damaged or destroyed, and over 13 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance, as a result of the seven-year conflict – now longer than World War II.