

'You can still save lives'; UN aid chief urges Security Council action to halt violence in Syria's war-battered east Ghouta

The United Nations humanitarian chief on Thursday called for action by the Security Council to halt the appalling destruction of Syria's eastern Ghouta, where nearly 300 people have reportedly been killed in just the past few days, as "bombs and mortars have rained down on bakeries and medical facilities."

"What we need is a sustained cessation of hostilities and we need it desperately," UN Emergency Relief Coordinator Mark Lowcock told the Council via video conference, adding: "Millions of battered and beleaguered children, women and men depend on meaningful action by this Council."

He told the gathering that as UN Member States, they are all aware that their obligations under international humanitarian law are just that; legally binding. "They are not favours to be traded in a game of death and destruction. Humanitarian access is not a 'nice-to-have.' It is a [legal requirement](#)."

Counter-terrorism efforts, Mr. Lowcock continued, cannot supersede the obligation to respect and protect civilians. "They do not justify the killing of civilians and the destruction of entire cities and neighborhoods."

"When an entire generation is robbed of its future, when hospital attacks have become the new normal, when sieges of entire cities and neighbourhoods have become a lasting reality for hundreds of thousands of people, the international community must take urgent and concrete action," he declared.

Reading out to the Council excerpts of thousands of text messages and social media posts received over the past three days by the Office of the UN Special Envoy for Syria in Geneva, from civilians in eastern Ghouta pleading for help, Mr. Lowcock said one aid worker had lamented:

Air raids have targeted residential buildings. Whole families have died under the rubble. Today, as the battles intensify I call on you [...] to act to stop the systematic operations against civilians and open the roads for humanitarian assistance— *ERC Lowcock, reading a message from an aid worker in east Ghouta*

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and open the roads for humanitarian assistance.”

Mr. Lowcock recalled that the Council had been briefed “in minute detail – month after month – on the scale of the suffering of the Syrian people,” with endless reports on dead and injured children, women and men.

“Airstrikes, mortars, rockets, barrel bombs, cluster munitions, chemical weapons, thermite bombs, suicide bombs snipers, double-tap attacks on civilians and the essential infrastructure they depend on, including hospitals and school, rape, illegal detention, torture, child recruitment and sieges of entire cities reminiscent of medieval times,” he detailed the situation.

He updated the members that over the past 24 hours, heavy shelling and aerial bombardment on multiple communities in East Ghouta continued, killing at least 50 and wounding some 200 people adding that according to some sources, the death toll since 19 February is close to 300 people.

Mr. Lowcock, noting that half of Syria’s population has either fled the country or faced repeated internal displacement.

“Eastern Ghouta is a living example of an entirely known, predictable, and preventable humanitarian disaster unfolding before our eyes,” he said, enumerating that nearly 400,000 people have been besieged for more than four years, thousands upon thousands of children face acute malnutrition and 700 people are in need of urgent medical evacuation to hospitals – just miles away from Damascus.

He highlighted that as the “appalling violence” ensues, accessing people in hard-to-reach and besieged areas remain elusive.

“Access is not only limited on aid deliveries, but we are also seeing growing challenges to our ability to independently assess needs on the ground and to monitor aid delivery,” he explained.

“You can still save lives in eastern Ghouta – and elsewhere in Syria. I urge you to do so,” the Emergency Relief Coordinator said.