

## **Press Release: Leading Syrian Women's Network Suspends All Activities Inside Syria Due to Escalating Violence- "Save Out Lives" Is Their Desperate Plea**

Following the attacks on Idlib and the escalation of violence against civilian areas across Syria, [Women Now for Development](#) announces the suspension of all its activities in the country from 5 until 10 April 2017. The situation in all areas we work in, ranging from airstrikes to chemical attacks, has deteriorated to a point which makes it impossible to continue our work [\[1\]](#).

Team members from all areas we are active in, stretching from the north to the south of the country are sending desperate messages calling for help to save their lives.

One Women Now activist in Douma wrote to us: *"Now I speak to you from an underground shelter, a kind of crypt which stinks with mould, and cries out with coldness and pain. All that is here for us is fear, helplessness and waiting for death. [...] Airplanes torment us, dropping bombs day and night [...] Around me are my children with their fragile bodies, it feels like the renewal of the siege has begun to eat at their very flesh."* (Full text available below)

Another woman activist in Idlib said: *"My husband, who is a doctor, was woken up at 6:30 in the morning, because people were being rushed into the hospital. The air filled quickly with some kind of chemical. At first, we assumed it was chlorine but the smell was different. We know chlorine and this was something else. There was so much of the chemical substance on the injured that the doctors and the staff in the hospital started getting sick from the mere presence of the injured in the building. They washed the injured seven times and the chemicals still wouldn't come off."*

Dr. Maria Alabdeh, Director of Women Now, said: *"Women activists across Syria are telling us they fear further massacres in the coming days and weeks ahead. Every day by Whatsapp, Skype and other means, they send us desperate pleas for help. The international community has issued so many statements about protecting and empowering Syrian women, but what does this all amount to if they let Syrian women get murdered as the world watches?"*

Women Now for Development supports women centres and other women-led activities in Idlib province, the Damascus suburb of Eastern Ghouta, and other regions of the country. These centres provide a safe space in which women come together to learn, support each other, gain income-generating skills and more.

Women activists associated with our network have bravely challenged human rights violations, including detention and violence against civilians.

As Women Now for Development, we will suspend our activities in order to protect our staff and the women and girls we work with. The besieged areas we work in have large civilian populations which are slowly being killed by the sieges, bombardment, chemical attacks and lack of any food or medical supplies [2]. Attacks continue on Idlib until now, with targeting of facilities that treat the victims. Our team on the ground has not rested or slept since the attacks began two days ago in order to tend to civilians and for fear of their families' lives.

We call on all parties involved in the conflict to stop the violation of international humanitarian law – stop using illegal weaponry, and stop indiscriminate and targeted violence against civilians – and for urgent action to hold perpetrators accountable. We call on those with the power to influence the Syrian regime and its allies to press for an end to the violence.

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#### END NOTES:

[1] On 4 April 2017, the world watched in horror as pictures emerged from Khan Sheikhun town in Idlib province, which showed suffocated children, women and men, from a chemical weapons attack. Eye witnesses and doctors report that at least 98 people have been killed and 382 wounded. The area attacked yesterday has no military presence. It is an exclusively civilian area with schools and hospitals and no presence of armed groups. According to our colleague in Idlib, just a few days before the chemical attack, Russian airstrikes had completely destroyed the near-by National Hospital, which was the largest hospital serving a catchment area of more than million people. Now, there is only one hospital left, which has neither the equipment, nor the capacity to treat the wounded.

[2] For besieged areas in Eastern Ghouta, the situation is severely deteriorating as well. For years there has been no reliable supply of humanitarian assistance to these areas and the regime and its allies have been bombing these areas heavily.

**Full text of letter received this week from woman activist trapped in Douma (Eastern Ghouta):**

*“From Eastern Ghouta, which the world used to see in images of the blossom and green of Spring, now we upload to you its photos, but today now the city wears red.*

*From a lone woman trapped by this siege, a civilian who wishes she was free to move, and to come and go.*

*She spent her life studying architecture so she might contribute to building the glory of her homeland. Now she speaks to you from an underground shelter, a kind of crypt which stinks with mould, and cries out with coldness and pain. All there is here for us is fear, helplessness and waiting for death.*

*Despite this shelter’s shortcomings, she and her children find comfort, safety and one place to survive here from airplanes that torment us, dropping bombs day and night*

*From here, and with around me my children with their fragile bodies, it felt like the renewal of the siege has begun to eat at their very flesh.*

*And death is watching from afar ..*

*We have had 130 air-raids since yesterday ..*

*45 martyrs (dead)..*

*Devastation...*

*Rockets ...*

*Crying and waiting for death ..*

*This is our situation now ... and as it has been for too long here in Douma ...*

*We ask you from here ..from the darkness of our basements, with their stench, their mould and fear, to the luxury and high-level of your meetings, I share with you now this cry from someone who needs help – me and those around me. I hope our common humanity can motivate you to do something for us...”*