

Syrian Regime Forces Use Chemical Weapons Again Despite Security Council Resolution 2401

The French President Should Form
an International Alliance to Deter
the Syrian Regime and its Allies
from Using Chemical Weapons

SNHR

SYRIAN NETWORK FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

الشبكة السورية لحقوق الإنسان

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The Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR), founded in June 2011, is a non-governmental, independent group that is considered a primary source for the OHCHR on all death toll-related analyses in Syria.



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I. Introduction

In each offensive that target the areas that have fallen out of its control, Syrian regime forces use the same inhumane strategy that starts with a siege that depletes residents' resources in conjunction with wide bombardments and deliberately destroying infrastructures, in addition to the heavy use of improvised munitions and prohibited weapons. In most cases, chemical attacks are carried out in the context of military progress, as SNHR team monitored frequently that the areas that are considered first lines on battlefronts have been targeted with chemical weapons which most likely comes after the Syrian regime had destroyed hospitals and killed paramedics. This was prominently seen in Eastern Aleppo's neighborhood at the end of 2016, where we documented 11 attacks on the front areas of Aleppo's eastern neighborhoods. The same scenario is being clearly played out in Eastern Ghouta now.

Since November 14, 2017, the day on which the recent offensive on Eastern Ghouta, Damascus suburbs started, we have recorded five chemical attacks carried out by the Syrian regime against Eastern Ghouta. Additionally, Syrian regime forces have carried out multiple attacks despite Security Council Resolution 2401, which calls for a ceasefire. We have been able to document the attack in this report in light of extraordinary difficulties and significant challenges in Eastern Ghouta these days. There are still three chemical attacks that are still being investigated by our team. Most of Eastern Ghouta's residents don't see the point of documentation efforts anymore after all the violations they've witnessed over the course of the past seven years, and the international community's shameful helplessness to stop and hold the Syrian regime accountable, as well as other perpetrators.



Fadel Abdul Ghany, chairman of SNHR, says:

“The Syrian regime has been responsible for tens of breaches of all of the Security Council Resolutions on the use of chemical weapons in Syria. The same Resolutions that provided that the Security Council will take action under Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations in the event of non-compliance on the Syrian regime’s part. However, the Security Council, the General Assembly, the Chemical Weapons Convention, and the International Criminal Court haven’t taken any action against the Syrian regime in this regard.”

Methodology

This report outlines the first chemical attack we’ve documented after Security Council Resolution 2401 was adopted. The report contains two accounts for people who were injured in the attack after they were treated. The accounts have been collected by speaking directly to eyewitnesses, and are not cited from open sources. We have explained the purpose of these interview for the witnesses who gave us permission to use the information they provided in the report without offering or giving them any incentives. Also, SNHR team tried to spare them the agony of remembering the violations as much as possible, and we concealed the identity of any witnesses who preferred to use an alias.

This report doesn’t include the social, economic, and mental ramifications and damages. In addition, we couldn’t take any blood or soil test samples for in light of the present circumstances. Eyewitnesses’ accounts corresponded with the pictures and videos we had analyzed, which yielded a high degree of credibility.

SNHR has analyzed videos and pictures that were posted online, or sent by local activists via e-mail, Skype, or social media. Some of the pictures showed some of the injured, including civil defense members, while a video, provided by a civil defense member, showed remnants of yellow cylinders we believe were loaded with gas.

We used the website “www.worldweatheronline.com” to assess the weather conditions such as temperature and windspeed.

II. Hamouriya Town Chemical Attack after Security Council Resolution 2401

The Syrian regime’s chemical attack on Hamouriya town comes as part of the most ruthless offensive against the region of Eastern Ghouta since March 2011 under a heavy support by Russian forces. We have recorded hundreds of violations since the offensive started in November 2017 in [a number of reports](#) that we have released over the past days and weeks.



In this report, we add a new use of chemical weapons, despite the repeated warnings of the French President and the American Administration, after everything we've recorded, including destroying medical facilities, ambulances, and civil defense facilities among other things.

Details

On Monday, March 5, 2018, between 21:00 and 22:00, a government forces helicopter dropped a barrel bomb loaded with a poison gas on the residential neighborhoods in south-eastern Hamouriya town. The attack resulted in [25 civilian injuries](#). Symptoms included [breathing difficulties](#) and [nausea](#). Among the 25 injured were two civil defense volunteers.

According to worldweatheronline.com, temperature in Damascus city and its surroundings was 17 Celsius at the closest time from the attack, about an hour difference, while wind-speed was 6 mph.

Most of the residents of Eastern Ghouta, including Hamouriya residents, live in basements in fear of the heavy airstrikes, which escalated the impact of the gas since it heavily concentrates in bunker and lower levels.

Alaa al Din¹, a civil defense member, responded to the calls of his colleagues after they were injured as they were tending to the wounded from the attack. He told us: **“I headed for the site about 30 minutes later. About 300 meters away, I identified the smell of chlorine. The attack occurred on the southeastern outskirts of Hamouriya. Once I got there, I saw two men, one woman, and one child who were suffering from suffocation.”** Alaa added that one of the two civil defense members who were injured in the attack told him that the barrel bomb was loaded with poison gases and that it looked like a yellow cylinder, adding that the situation was addressed by taking it to an empty area. They suffered from symptoms, the injured civil defense added, even though they were wearing protective masks.

Alaa headed for the location where the barrel bomb was transferred three hours after the attack: **“As soon as I got there, I started feeling my eyes burning and my breathing affected all of a sudden. I was able to take a picture of the barrel bomb, and the gas was still leaking out. The barrel bomb was yellow-colored.”** Alaa described the symptoms he suffered from: **“I felt a sting in my lungs, and some sort of burn in my throat and eyes, in addition to extreme breathing difficulties. My friend suffered from a dizziness and nausea as well.”**

¹ We contacted him via WhatsApp



We kept a copy Alaa provided, which shows a yellow cylinder that is closely similar to the munitions that were used in past attacks. The video also shows a yellow-colored gas that was leaking from the nozzle.

Abdul Mu'in Eisa², a photographer in Hamouriya town, saw some of the injured: **“I saw four children and two women that were rushed to the medical point. There were two civil defense volunteers who were largely affected by the gas. That happened after they tried to move the chlorine-loaded barrel bomb to an empty area.”** Abdul Mu'in Eissa visited the attack site and then suffered from symptoms that affected his breathing: **“The barrel bomb landed in an agricultural land between the towns of Beit Sawa and Hamouriya. As soon as I arrived, I started suffering from breathing difficulties. I put on a mask and started taking pictures of the barrel bomb. A yellow-colored gas was leaking out of it. One of its sides were dented due to the impact. I couldn't distinguish any serial numbers. The breathing difficulties intensified, so I went to the hospital where I was sprayed and injected.”**



Three children receiving treatment in the aftermath of a chemical air attack by Syrian regime forces on Hamouriya town – March 5, 2018

² We contacted him via WhatsApp



II. Conclusions and Recommendations

The Syrian regime has, through the use of chemical weapons in Hamouriya town, violated the customary international humanitarian law, which prohibits the use of chemical weapons regardless of the circumstances. Secondly, the Syrian regime has, beyond any doubt, violated the CWC, to which the Syrian government had acceded in September 2013. The CWC prohibits the use of poison gases and provides for their destruction. Thirdly, the Syrian regime has breached all relevant Security Council Resolutions – particularly 2118, in 2013, 2209, in 2015, and 2235, in 2015. Also, the use of chemical weapons constitutes a war crime according to the International Criminal Court's Rome Statute.

In addition, the Russian government had ratified to the CWC which strictly prohibits any form of assistance or encouragement on the contribution to any prohibited activity by any member state. However, a number of evidences suggest that Russian forces were involved in providing a preliminary and succeeding assistance to Syrian regime forces.

Further, the attack on Hamouriya town constitutes a violation of Resolution 2401, which was adopted by the Security Council on February 24, 2018. The Resolution provides for the cessation of indiscriminate attack, and the passage of aids into besieged areas.

Security Council

- The Syrian regime has violated three Security Council resolutions on multiple occasions, even though all of them refer to Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations.
- The four permanent members should apply pressure on the Russian government in order to cease its support for the Syrian regime, who is using chemical weapons, as its involvement in this regard has been proven.
- The Security Council should take further and practical action after Resolution 2401 has been adopted and clearly violated by Syrian-Russian-Iranian alliance forces.

United Nations

Apply pressure on the Syrian regime in order to compel it to allow the entrance of medical supplies that was removed from the convoy that entered Eastern Ghouta, Damascus suburbs, on March 5 and March 9, 2018. The UN should also commit to deliver complete aids that are sufficient for all the residents of Eastern Ghouta.

Human Rights Council

The Human Rights Council should shed more light on the use of chemical weapons by the Syrian regime.

Commission of Inquiry (COI)

The Commission of Inquiry should start investigating this incident immediately, as well as the bombing incidents that preceded and the ones that followed and identify their perpetrator.



International, Impartial, and Independent Mechanism (IIIM)

Address the incident included in this report, as well as past reports. SNHR is prepared to cooperate and provide more evidences and data.

European Union and United States of America

Support the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism that was established in accordance with General Assembly Resolution 71/248, adopted on December 21, 2016. And establish local tribunals that enjoy a universal jurisdiction, and address the war crimes that were perpetrated in Syria.

International Community

- States of the world should demonstrate a better unity against the Syrian regime – the main and primary user of chemical weapons in this century. Also, the international community should take serious, joint action to impose deterring, strict, real sanctions immediately.
- Establish a humanitarian alliance that aims to protect civilians in Syria from chemical weapons and barrel bombs since Russia will keep hindering the Security Council and using veto countless times.

Russian government

- Respect Security Council Resolution 2401 that calls for an immediate cessation of hostilities, and apply pressure on the Syrian regime to commit to the Resolution.
- Stop using veto in order to protect the Syrian regime who is involved in perpetrating crimes against humanity and war crimes, as well as using chemical weapons.
- Launch an investigation into the support provided by Russian forces in Syria to the Syrian regime in Hamouriya town attack.
- Stop hindering the referral the case in Syria to the International Criminal Court.

Friends of Syria Group

Provide the areas that have been bombed with chemical weapons (in light of the Security Council's failure to put an end to the attacks) with protective masks. The report estimates that no less than 20,000 protective masks are needed in these areas, in addition to the necessary equipment to get rid of the impact of the chemical pollution.

Acknowledgment

We would like to thank all the victims, injured, and their families, as well as the residents and activists who contributed effectively to this report.





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